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This fact alone surely justifies the maintenance, where possible, of a badly-attended service, and dignifies the assembling together of the poorest and most uneducated. It is scarcely necessary to note what a stimulus to hearty and reverent co-operation in prayer and praise this sublime thought can supply to all who are privileged to share in that which is the loftiest attainment of man, the recognition of his Creator.

"Christ! in Thy Name alone
As sons of God we come,
Thou mak'st us partners of Thine own,
And Heaven is now our home.

Through Thee we come, nor now
Without the veil we stand,
But boldly enter in where Thou
Art set at God's right hand.

Then we in faith draw nigh
Where Saints and Angels meet;
Come to the throne of the Most High,
And find a mercy-seat."

NEWPORT J. D. WHITE.

THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.

(6) THE ETHICS OF CONTROVERSY.

THERE is a remarkable disparity, the explanation of which is not very apparent, between the place which controversy holds in the pages of the New Testament and the attention given to it in our handbooks of Christian Ethics. Though, as will presently be shown, we owe the very form in which a large part of the New Testament has come down to us to the controversies in which St. Paul was called to bear a leading part, and though Christ Himself was engaged in almost unceasing strife with His opponents, the need and the temper of controversy are questions concerning which our ethical text-books are almost wholly silent. In such

a survey, however, as is being attempted in these papers it is impossible to ignore St. Paul the controversialist; from the ethics of the intellect we turn, therefore, to the ethics of controversy.

I.

In Thomas Fuller's *Holy and Profane States* "the Controversial Divine" has a place given him side by side with "the Good Judge," "the Good Physician," and "the Faithful Minister." It is to be feared, however, that in our own day controversy has fallen into evil repute. Most of us would probably hesitate to accord to the Christian controversialist equal rank with the Christian teacher or evangelist. We scarcely expect in him those rarer graces and virtues which are the finest bloom of the Christian spirit. Nor is it difficult to understand how this has come about. When we remember the pettiness and triviality of the causes for which men have fought, the fierce and undying animosities which their controversies have kindled, the futility and barrenness of their results, is it any marvel that, in the eyes of many, controversy has come to be of no more worth than the chattering of sparrows, or the bickerings of kites and crows? Other reasons less worthy have contributed to the same end. The love of ease, the craven fear of conflict, the weakened regard for the sacredness of truth, the impatient scepticism which doubts even the attainability of truth, the moral cynicism with its shameless cry, "Nothing is certain and nothing matters"—these things also have had their influence in turning men aside from the paths of controversy.

Nevertheless, however badly controversialists may sometimes have served the cause of truth, we ought not to forget that we are all debtors to the controversies of the past. Is it possible, e.g., to exaggerate the significance of those momentous discussions in the early Church

concerning the Person of our Lord which were ultimately closed by the adoption of the Creed which now for nearly sixteen centuries has remained the expression of the faith of practically the whole Christian Church? In his story of the closing days of Thomas Carlyle's life, Mr. Froude says: "In speaking of Gibbon's work to me he made one remark which is worth recording. In earlier years he had spoken contemptuously of the Athanasian controversy, of the Christian world torn in pieces over a diphthong, and he would ring the changes in broad Annandale on the Homoousion and the Homoiousion. He told me now that he perceived Christianity itself to have been at stake. If the Arians had won, it would have dwindled away into a legend."[1] Or take the history of the Reformation. Every one knows with what wild strife, with what tumult and bloodshed, that great change was accomplished. But if Erasmus and Luther and Calvin had made no protest, if they had shut their eyes and stopped their ears, and cried "peace, peace," when there was no peace, where would have been the great inheritance of freedom upon which, at no price of blood and tears of ours, we have entered? The same may be said of the interminable religious controversies of Scotland. No one, indeed, will deny that Scotland has been plagued with controversies which she might and ought to have been spared; but, on the other hand, does any one who has not suffered ecclesiastical prejudice to put out the eyes of his understanding suppose that Knox and Melville and the Men of the Covenant and the leaders of the Disruption were only stiff and obstinate men, possessed by the devil of contradictiousness, and not rather the champions of great and worthy principles on which mighty issues hung, alike for themselves, their country, and the world?

But it is to the New Testament itself we turn for the

[1] *Carlyle's Life in London*, vol. ii. p. 494.

most striking evidence of our indebtedness to the controversies of the past. Few Christian readers perhaps realize how large a portion of that book we owe in the wisdom of God to the conflicts in which from time to time Christ and His Apostles were engaged. So far as Christ's life is concerned it may be sufficient to mention one fact. In Dr. Stalker's well-known volume, *Imago Christi*, he tells us that had it been possible for him to print in full the evidence from the Gospels of the conduct of Jesus in the different departments of life of which his book treats, the bulkiest of all these bodies of evidence would have been the appendix to the chapter, "Christ as a Controversialist."[1] The Apostle John is not usually associated in men's minds with controversy and the strife of tongues; yet his exhortations to charity and brotherly love are not more repeated and emphatic than is his condemnation of the false teachers over against whose false doctrine he sets the truth as it had been revealed to him by and concerning Jesus Christ. And the same is true of St. Paul. "Certain men came down from Judæa and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."[2] Here was the beginning of a warfare from which for many weary years the Apostle could obtain no discharge. The battle of spiritual freedom had to be fought out, not only in Jerusalem, but on the mission field, and among his own converts. Some of the letters of this period, especially that to the Galatians, read like keen, controversial pamphlets, And what perhaps hurt him most of all, the Apostle had to turn his sword against

[1] *Imago Christi*, p. 285. [2] Acts xv. 1, 2.

some who should have been his comrades-in-arms.[1] In all its essentials St. Paul's gospel would doubtless have been the same whatever the circumstances under which it had been given to the world; it is none the less a fact that the particular form in which it has come to us was determined in no small degree by the character of the conflict into which he was driven. How momentous that conflict was it is not necessary now to explain. Suffice it to say that if those who taught, saying, "Except ye be circumcised ye cannot be saved," had won the day—and, speaking after the manner of men, but for the resolute resistance of St. Paul they would have won—Christianity would have been strangled in its cradle.

Facts like these have not lost their significance for us to-day. If the faith "once for all delivered unto the saints" is to be kept, it must be fought for. *Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work and with the other held his weapon; and the builders every one had his sword girded by his side and so builded;* and the sword as well as the trowel is needed still. This question of controversy is one of those matters in which, with the best intentions in the world—in large measure indeed because of our good intentions—it is very easy to fall a victim to mistaken ideas. There are many people, it has been truly said, who think that the kingdom of heaven means first a quiet life and the cultivation of friendly feeling all round.[2]

[1] Gal. ii. 11 seq.

[2] P. T. Forsyth's *Rome, Reform, and Reaction*, p. 15, where will be found some very sensible and timely comments on the need of controversy in the present day. "One reason," says Dr. Forsyth, "why controversy is deprecated at present is that sympathy has been growing at the expense of principle. Our philanthropic energies have, for the time, submerged our energies of righteousness. I do not say so in a grudging spirit. We move forward with one foot at a time. For the present it is the turn of the heart side; but the time is far spent, and it grows needful that, if we are to keep from falling, there should be a step by the other foot and a movement of the other side. . . . There is a worse thing than the temper and abuse of controversy, and that is the mawkish sweetness and maudlin

It is a grievous misunderstanding. "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost"; but it is righteousness first, and the price of righteousness in a world like ours is conflict. The Christian Church is much more than a Sister of Charity; she has not merely to sit by sick-beds, and play the Lady Bountiful to poor people, and rush between armies on the field of battle and reconcile the combatants by reminding them of their brotherhood[1]; the Church is called to be a warrior of God; she must take her part "in the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side." Like her Lord, she too must often bring not peace but a sword.[2] There is, as we all know, a zeal which is not according to knowledge, and is still less according to love, which does not care for peace as peace ought always to be cared for, whose hand flies to the sword-hilt all too readily. But there is a spirit more to be feared, more to be watched and prayed against even than this, and that is the moral indifferentism which is too careless to distinguish truth from error, or right from wrong, and will tolerate anything, if only it may be left undisturbed in its own selfish peace. By all means let us seek peace; but let us not forget that, as Ruskin has told us, peace may be sought in two ways:

piety of the people who are everybody's brothers and can stand up to none." From a very different point of view Mr. H. G. Wells also notes "the absence of good controversy" as "one of the least satisfactory features of the intellectual atmosphere of the present time." "A great number of people are expressing conflicting opinions upon all sorts of things, but there is a quite remarkable shirking of plain issues of debate. There is no answering back. There is much indirect answering, depreciation of the adversary, attempts to limit his publicity, restatements of the opposing opinion in a new way, but no conflict in the lists." (*Anticipations*, pop. ed., p. 105).

[1] See *Ecce Homo*, pop. ed., p. 201.

[2] Cp. Sir John Eliot's great speech during the Parliament of 1629: "There is a ceremony used in the eastern churches of standing at the repetition of the Creed to testify their purpose to maintain it, and as some had it, not only with their bodies upright but with their swords drawn. Give me leave to call that a custom very commendable."

"One way is as Gideon sought it, when he built his altar in Ophrah, naming it 'God send peace,' yet sought this peace that he loved as he was ordered to seek it, and the peace was sent in God's way:—'the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.' And the other way of seeking peace is as Menahem sought it, when he gave the King of Assyria a thousand talents of silver, that 'his hand might be with him.' That is, you may either win your peace, or buy it: win it, by resistance to evil—buy it, by compromise with evil. You may buy your peace, with silenced consciences; you may buy it, with broken vows,—buy it, with lying words; buy it, with base connivances,—buy it, with the blood of the slain, and the cry of the captive, and the silence of lost souls."[1] And that is not peace; it is death.

II.

But urgent as may be the call to controversy, it can never be more urgent than the call to take heed what manner of controversialists we are. We turn, therefore, in the second part of this paper to note (still under the guidance of St. Paul) some of the perils which beset the controversial temper.

First among these is that unlovely spirit of contentiousness which delights in strife, not for the truth's sake, but only for its own sake. Now whatever may be the worth of honest, earnest controversy, this is sheer pugilism, and is no more deserving of respect than the spirit of the prize-fighter. Every child knows Gulliver's story of the Big-Endians and the Small-Endians and their barren strife; the pity of it is these noisy disputants have found their way into the Christian Church and have filled its quiet air with their unseemly clamour. It is to this unhappy temper we owe most of those miserable controversies about the straws

[1] *The Two Paths*, p. 244.

and sticks and dust of the floor that have been the bane of Christendom. *Disputandi pruritus fit Ecclesiarum scabies.*[1] The caustic saying of a college don that the discussion whether the planets are inhabited was one eminently suited for theology because no evidence was available on either side of the question, was a not undeserved satire on the tendency from which the Church has never been wholly free, to waste its strength in ignorant and foolish questionings which do indeed gender strifes, but which, because they are remote from life and fact, do nothing else. The truth of these things no one knew better than did St. Paul himself, and his Epistles abound with warnings on this very matter. "If any man," he wrote to the disputatious Corinthians,[2] "seemeth [or, is minded to be] contentious (φιλόνεικος), we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." A bishop, he tells Timothy—it is in the Pastoral Epistles that most of the relevant passages appear—must be "not contentious" (ἄμαχος)[3]; and in the letter to Titus the injunction is extended to all sorts and conditions of men.[4] Elsewhere, he speaks of those who are "puffed up, knowing nothing, but doting about questionings and disputes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupt in mind and bereft of the truth"; [5] and in the last letter which we have from

[1] From the inscription which Sir Henry Wotton directed to be placed on the slab which marks his grave:

Hic jacet hujus sententiae primus author.
Disputandi pruritus fit Ecclesiarum scabies.
Nomen alias quaere.

(Here lies the original author of the saying, The itch for controversy is the scab of the Church. Seek his name elsewhere.)

[2] 1 Cor. xi. 16. "The disputatiousness of the Corinthians ran into everything—a woman's shawl or the merits of the Arch-apostles!" (G. G. Findlay, 1 *Corinthians*, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 876.)

[3] 1 Tim. iii. 3.

[4] Titus iii. 2.

[5] 1 Tim. vi. 4-5. On the striking phrase νοσῶν περὶ ζητήσεις see (sub νοσέω) Grimm's Lexicon: "περί τι, to be taken with such an interest in a thing as amounts to a disease, to have a morbid fondness for."

his pen he first bids Timothy charge them over whom he is set in the Lord, "that they strive not about words, to no profit, to the subverting of them that hear," and then to take heed likewise to himself: "Shun profane babblings. . . . Foolish and ignorant questionings refuse, knowing that they gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive." [1]

But worse even than the spirit of contentiousness which controversy so often breeds, are the loss of temper, the misrepresentation, the imputation of evil motives, of which controversialists are so often guilty. Reading the history of some of the controversies of the past, and not least its religious controversies, and observing the manners of some of the controversialists, one is tempted to wish for the presence of some high official, armed with authority, like the referee at a football match, to order off the field any one who deliberately violates the rules of the contest. Perhaps one of the worst illustrations of the depths of malignity to which the controversial temper can descend is afforded by the glimpses we get in St. Paul's Epistles, and especially in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, of the treatment meted out to him by his Judaizing opponents. When he changed his plans "they called him a weathercock, a Yes-and-No man, who said now one thing and now the opposite, who said both at once and with equal emphasis, who had his own interests in view in his fickleness, and whose word, to speak plainly, could never be depended upon." [2] His speech, they said, was rude, and his bodily presence weak; he might use big, swelling

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 14, 16, 23, 24. I have not included the reference to the "doubtful disputations" of Romans xiv. 1, since that phrase hardly conveys the Apostle's idea. The meaning of his injunction seems to be, "Him that is weak in faith receive ye, but *not to pass judgments on his thoughts.*"

[2] 2 Cor. i. 18, 19. See Denney's *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, *Expositor's Bible*, p. 37.

words at a distance, but let him come among them and they would find him meek enough.[1] They even dared to charge him with mercenary motives, and to suggest that he was making a good thing for himself out of the collection about which he was so anxious; and then with that inconsistency into which the tongue of the backbiter so readily slips they twisted his innocent refusal to accept support from the Corinthians into an acknowledgment that after all he was but an interloper whose uneasy conscience would not let him claim the maintenance which was every true apostle's right.[2]

This is bad enough, but it is probably not worse than much that has happened since in the field of religious controversy; and the strange thing is that good men have often been the worst offenders. When Tertullian denounces those who differ from him on baptism as vipers and monsters,[3] something must be allowed for the fierceness of his hot African blood; but when we hear men like Samuel Rutherford, and Richard Baxter, and the author of "Rock of Ages," assailing Christian opponents with the violence of an angry fish-wife, what can we say?[4] There is no need to dwell upon the ugly facts, but the moral of them is plain: controversy is necessary, but not all men are called, because not all men are fit, to wield its weapons. To use another figure, controversy is a strong and heady wine of which most men do well to drink but sparingly. And if when a man enters into debate he begins to lose his

[1] 2 Cor. x. 1–10; xi. 6.

[2] 2 Cor. xi. 7–9; xii. 16.

[3] Farrar's *Lives of the Fathers*, vol. i. p. 169.

[4] On Rutherford as a controversialist see some admirable remarks by Mr. Taylor Innes, whose lecture in the *Evangelical Succession* series is perhaps the most illuminating estimate of Rutherford we possess. Of Toplady it is unnecessary to speak. If I were to transcribe here the language which he used of Wesley, readers who were not already familiar with the facts would scarcely credit their own eyes. (See Tyerman's *Life and Times of John Wesley.*)

temper, or to misrepresent his adversary's case, or to impute to him unworthy motives, then the field of controversy is no place for him. We may be on the side of truth, but if we go into the battle with poisoned arrows in our quiver, we are the enemies of God and of all righteousness.

Prefixed to one of John Wesley's early controversial publications is a brief address "to the reader" which sums up so admirably the true spirit of the Christian controversialist that I venture to reproduce it almost in full: "This is the first time I have appeared in controversy, properly so called. I now tread an untried path 'with fear and trembling'; fear, not of my adversary, but of myself. I fear my own spirit, lest I 'fall where many mightier have been slain.' I never knew one man (or but one) write controversy with what I thought a right spirit. Every disputant seems to think (as every soldier) that he may hurt his opponent as much as he can; nay, that he ought to do his worst to him, or he cannot make the best of his own cause. But ought these things to be so? Ought we not to love our neighbour as ourselves? And does a man cease to be our neighbour because he is of a different opinion; nay, and declare himself so to be? Ought we not, for all this, to do to him as we would he should do to us? But do we ourselves love to be exposed, or set in the worst light? Would we willingly be treated with contempt? If not, why do we treat others thus? And yet who scruples it? Who does not hit every blow he can, however foreign to the merits of the cause? Who, in controversy, casts the mantle of love over the nakedness of his brother? Who keeps steadily and uniformly to the question, without ever striking at the person? Who shows, in every sentence, that he loves his brother only less than the truth? I have made a little faint essay towards this. I have a brother who is as my own soul. My desire is, in

every word I say, to look upon Mr. —— as in his place; and to speak no tittle concerning the one in any other spirit than I would speak concerning the other. But whether I have attained this or no, I know not; for my heart is 'deceitful and desperately wicked.' If I have spoken anything in another spirit, I pray God it may not be laid to my charge; and that it may not condemn me in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest! Meanwhile, my heart's desire and prayer to God is, that both I, and all who think it their duty to oppose me, may 'put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.'"[1] When a man is able to bear himself thus he may plunge without fear into the thickest of the strife; but God will have no man to fight the battles of His faith who cannot fight with clean hands. Is it too much to hope that at last the time is really at hand when, as Dean Church says, even our most serious controversies, even our great and apparently hopeless controversy with Rome, may be carried on as if in the presence and under the full knowledge and judgment of the Lord of truth and charity?[2]

III.

One point still remains to be considered. It may be urged that St. Paul himself is not a safe guide in matters of controversy; that, e.g., in his controversial use of the Old Testament, and especially in the tone of intellectual intolerance into which he occasionally suffers himself to be betrayed, he has set us an example which we should do well not to follow.

The Apostle's use of the Old Testament raises the whole

[1] Wesley's *Works*, vol. viii. p. 359.
[2] *Life and Letters*, p. 301.

question of the apostolic interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures—a subject obviously much too large for discussion here. It may at once be admitted that St. Paul's methods are not those of modern exegesis. No theologian to-day would for a moment dream of fortifying his conclusions by heaping together a number of "proof texts" in the fashion, e.g., we find in Romans iii. 10–18. Not unfrequently Old Testament quotations are made with an entire disregard of their original context, and in some cases even in a sense exactly opposite to that which they originally possessed.[1] But we have no right, therefore, to conclude that St. Paul was a controversialist without a conscience. He had been trained as a Rabbi; it was inevitable that he should sometimes make use of Rabbinical methods. That these are obsolete to-day is only another way of saying that the science of interpretation, like its sister sciences, is progressive. To blame St. Paul because his literary methods were those of the first century and not those of the twentieth, would be as unreasonable as to criticize Themistocles because he did not adopt modern naval tactics at the battle of Salamis. In saying this, however, it must be borne in mind that the number of Old Testament quotations to which the foregoing remarks apply is relatively small. In the majority of instances "the texts are used in a sense corresponding to their Old Testament meaning."[2] Further, with very rare exceptions (of which Galatians iv. 22 seq. is the most conspicuous example) St. Paul abstains from those allegorical methods of interpretation which, at a later period, were carried to such a foolish and perilous extreme.[3]

[1] See a valuable note on "St. Paul's Use of the Old Testament" in Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, p. 302.

[2] Ibid. p. 303.

[3] "The sober and reasonable use of the Old Testament in the New forms a striking and instructive contrast to the arbitrary allegorical system of interpretation which is to be found in contemporary Jewish writings, such as those of the Alexandrian Philo, or in the earliest post-

Lastly, and most important of all, whatever may be said of the Apostle's interpretation of individual passages, his interpretation of the Old Testament as a whole stands in need of no justification. It triumphed over Judaism, and it remains a living word still, because it saw and seized upon the true spiritual significance of the Hebrew story. *Ye search the Scriptures . . . . and ye will not come to Me:* that was the tragedy of Judaism; that is why it still wanders in the desert. *These are they,* the Apostle saw and said, *which bear witness of Him,* and so seeing and saying, entered into the Promised Land.

When St. Paul is charged with intellectual intolerance it is usually the twice repeated anathema, uttered against those who preach any other gospel than that which he preached, which his critics have in mind.[1] But it is surely unfair to rest a charge so serious upon evidence so scanty. We must judge St. Paul as we should expect to be judged ourselves, by the testimony of his whole life. And when we remember the unwillingness to lord it over his converts' faith,[2] his deference in putting forward his own judgment on a difficult matter,[3] his generous and ungrudging recognition of the ministry of men whose names were used as rallying cries against himself,[4] his sincere rejoicing that Christ was preached "even of envy and strife,"[5] we must allow that if, as Sabatier says,[6] St. Paul's intellectual temperament was "naturally intolerant," grace had wrought a wondrous change. Concerning the anathema—the emphasis of which is unmistakable—two things should be

apostolic Christian writings, such as the Epistle to Barnabas." (A. F. Kirkpatrick's *Divine Library of the Old Testament*, p. 115.)

[1] Gal. i. 8–9; cp. also Rom. xvi. 17, 1 Tim. i. 3, vi. 3.

[2] 2 Cor. i. 24.

[3] 1 Cor. vii. 12, 25, 40.

[4] 1 Cor. iii. 22.

[5] Phil. i. 15–18.

[6] The *Apostle Paul*, p. 54.

kept in mind. In the first place, the Apostle is not speaking thus in defence of his own private opinions, but in the full consciousness of his Divine appointment as a guardian and trustee of God's truth. Further, St. Paul was not one of those to whom the whole duty of man consists in keeping an open mind. Some questions there are which all earnest, right-thinking men regard as closed, and which they rightly refuse to re-open. We may call St. Paul intolerant if we choose, but it is with the intolerance which every good man must show on occasion. Have we not all convictions which admit of no questioning, which it would be treason to our deepest selves even to discuss? If any man dare to assail them, we shall answer him not with arguments but with anathemas. There is an intolerance which is set on fire of hell; there is also an intolerance which is but the reflected glow of the Divine passion against all untruth and iniquity.[1]

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[1] Dr. Denney has an admirable note on Gal. i. 8–9: "I cannot agree with those who disparage this, or affect to forgive it, as the unhappy beginning of religious intolerance. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament has any conception of a religion without this intolerance. The first commandment is, 'Thou shalt have none other gods besides Me,' and that is the foundation of all true religion. As there is only one God, so there can only be one Gospel. If God has really done something in Christ on which the salvation of the world depends, and if He has made it known, then it is a Christian duty to be intolerant of everything which ignores, denies, or explains it away. The man who perverts it is the worst enemy of God and men; and it is not bad temper or narrow-mindedness in St. Paul which explains this vehement language; it is jealousy of God which has kindled in a soul redeemed by the death of Christ a corresponding jealousy for the Saviour." (*The Death of Christ*, p. 110.)