THE JEWISH BIAS OF PAUL

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NO one will question the predominantly Jewish character of the Christian movement in the initial stages of its history. Its home was Palestine. Its principal advocates were Jewish peasants. They spoke the Aramaic language, and had no thought of receiving into their fellowship any persons of non-Jewish blood and culture. But as early as the year 50 the new religion had spread to gentile lands where it quickly attracted to itself many converts. Some of these extra-Palestinian congregations were composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The church at Antioch in the time of Paul probably was made up of Jews, proselytes, and uncircumcized Greeks. At Corinth, on the other hand, the membership seems to have been mainly gentile from the start, while the group at Rome apparently included many Jews and proselytes. But within a relatively brief period, the earlier Jewish adherents of Christianity were largely supplanted by Gentiles.

How Christianity, originally a purely Jewish undertaking, became within less than half a century after the death of Jesus a religion of the gentile world at large, is still an inviting problem for the historian. The prominence of Paul in the New Testament literature has led most scholars to seek in him the key to this remarkable transition. His long-famous disputes with the Judaizing Christians of his day, who wished to bring all converts first within the Jewish fold in order to insure for them final salvation through belief on

Christ, has sometimes prompted the assertion that Paul is virtually the founder of gentile Christianity. Or, if he is not strictly its founder, at least he is given credit for comprehending the real intention of Jesus and understanding the implications of Jesus' mission more perfectly than had any previous disciple. If one wishes to claim Jesus as the real author of gentile Christianity, then Paul is its second founder, who quite overshadows the older apostolic leaders whose Semitic leanings are thought to have disqualified them for missionary activity beyond the confines of Judaism.

One might say that it is of the very genius of Protestantism to revere Paul as the great liberator of Christianity from its Jewish bondage. His teaching regarding salvation by faith, in contrast with a salvation to be accomplished through the keeping of the Law, made possible a purely gentile religion; and it is popularly assumed that Paul set Jews aside as radically as gentile Christianity itself has remained separate from Judaism. One is not indeed to affirm that Paul was unaware or unappreciative of the large Jewish heritage that had gone into the making of his new faith. No one doubts that he saw in Christianity the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and that he took over the Bible of the Hebrews as wholeheartedly as it has been held during succeeding ages to be a properly Christian possession. On the other hand, it is commonly imagined that Paul believed as completely as did later generations of gentile Christians that God had established the new religion in order to rescue the treasures of revelation from the once chosen people and pass them on to a more efficient guardian, a gentile Christian church.

Again, Protestantism's preference for Paul over Peter has further augmented the disposition to sever the former from his original Jewish connections. The fact that Paul, under the heat of controversy, had affirmed Peter's specific work to be the preaching of the gospel to the Jews, has been taken as sufficient evidence for believing that Peter himself would have accepted this restricted definition of his task or that he at a later date would never have changed his conception of his mission. Then too, the early claim of the Roman

church to have been founded by Peter, who thus insured the supreme authority of the papacy, has proved to be historically so questionable that Peter's possible significance for the spread of Christianity beyond strictly Jewish boundaries has been only tardily appreciated by Protestants. Until within relatively recent times, their prevailing disposition has been to make Paul exclusively the one who deliberately placed himself in the foreground of missionary activity, with the definite purpose of establishing Christianity permanently in a new home among the Gentiles. He, it is thought, had been fully conscious of a conviction that the new enterprise could no longer be regarded as a Jewish affair and that in future it must accomplish its destiny as an increasingly gentile movement.

In the Christianity of Paul there are so many things now known to have been quite un-Jewish, that it is not unnatural for present-day scholarship to emphasize his gentile proclivities rather than to stress his Jewish leanings. Modern research has made it quite evident that the Pauline christology, the Pauline mysticism, and indeed elements of sacramentalism in the Pauline letters, have a much closer kinship with the current religions of the gentile world than they have with contemporary Judaism. The hero of faith whom Paul depicted as crucified and risen is more closely analogous to the hero-saviors of the pagan cults than to any figure discernible in Jewish tradition. Also the emotional experience of the Corinthian group, acting under the permanent endowment of the Holy Spirit, which inspires its members to speak with tongues or display other activities of a highly emotional character, suggests nothing of the sobriety of Jewish worship exemplified in the contemporary synagogues. Then, too, in connection with the Christian rite of baptism and the observance of its religious meal, Paul exhibits sacramental tendencies not to be duplicated in the Jewish religion of his day.

Recognizing the elements of validity in this more recent emphasis on distinctively gentile characteristics within the Christianity of Paul, we might think it all the more apparent

that his fight to liberate the new cause from bondage to the Jewish Law meant for him a conscious effort to establish a movement independent of Judaism, even of Jewish Christianity. Certainly there is no ambiguity in his affirmation of a gentile Christian's independence of the law of circumcision. From the time the question first arises in connection with the activity of the legalists among the Galatian churches, on to the very end of Paul's career, he never wavers in his defense of absolute liberty for gentile converts. A group of such believers, when baptized and endowed by the Holy Spirit and living a life of loyalty to the risen Christ both in public and private activities, constitutes for Paul an entirely legitimate and fully equipped Christian church.

It is perfectly apparent to a modern observer that the logical outcome of Paul's position was the rise of a new gentile church destined to become more and more distinct from Judaism. There is indeed no question regarding the abundant Jewish heritages that passed over into this gentile Christianity. They are too well known and too generally recognized today to call for further emphasis. In releasing these inheritances from subservience to Jewish legalism, Paul may be said to have preserved the noblest features in Judaism, while at the same time he made possible the spread of Christianity to the world at large. Thus he became the exponent of a new religion which, to use Baur's phrase, is "the absolute power of the spiritual life." In the attachment to Christ effected through faith, Paul is said to stand "on a platform where he is infinitely above Judaism, where he has passed far beyond all that is merely relative, limited, and finite in the Jewish religion, and has risen to the absolute religion." (F. C. Baur, *Paul*, Vol. II, pp. 125 f.) Later scholarship has modified somewhat the statement of Baur, yet there is still a prevailing disposition to make Paul deliberately sever the new cause from its earlier Jewish connections.

Does this truly represent the apostle's state of mind? Does he think that Christianity is ultimately to become a religion whose membership will be composed exclusively of gentile

converts? Does it seem to him that Judaism has been forever superseded and that the promises made by God in times of old to his chosen people have now been transferred to men of a different race? Are we to infer that his struggle to free gentile converts from the law of circumcision was thought by him to be the first step in the founding of a new religion to transcend and supplant Judaism?

In the composition of his letters, Paul was not often called upon by the circumstances to make discriminating pronouncements upon this subject. Yet he has on occasion expressed himself very definitely to the effect that he regards the climax of Christianity's success to belong emphatically in the Jewish rather than in the gentile area of religious realization. His statements in the ninth to the eleventh chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are known to everybody, although they are not so frequently cited in this connection as are such chapters as the seventh of Romans and the second of Galatians. But Paul himself is fully convinced that the temporary hesitation of Israel in receiving the gospel is a condition presently to be reversed. In the meantime the Gentiles are having the advantage of hearing the missionary preachers. But Paul stoutly affirms that in the new scheme of things God has not cast off his chosen people, nor have the religious treasures revealed to them in the past been handed over to new guardians. Jewish Christians are to be the main trunk of the gospel tree, while Gentiles are only engrafted branches.

Again, Paul's outlook upon the future clearly reveals the strength of his Jewish proclivities. Missionary work among Gentiles is a temporary activity which must be brought to a conclusion as hastily as possible in order that the great consummation to be effected by Jesus' return and the establishment of the eschatological kingdom may be realized. The time is short; the Lord is at hand. Indeed, Paul can believe that the preaching of Christianity has been adequately done in all the territory from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum before the year 60 (Rom. 15 19). Now Paul is ready to pass on to Spain, which is to be the final outpost of the gentile

mission. We may assume that he thinks others have preached or are preaching sufficiently at Rome, Alexandria, and other important centers about the Mediterranean. He could hardly have supposed that these hasty missionary activities had established a Christianity to endure for centuries as a successful rival to and an ultimate victor over all the heathen religions of the Roman Empire. What Paul assumed was that he and his fellow-laborers were giving the Gentiles the full measure of opportunity which God had designed them to have. The great Christian triumph was to be distinctly a Jewish affair, to which a few Christian Gentiles would be admitted with full privileges. But the stage of this consummation certainly was to be Palestine, undoubtedly Jerusalem itself. It was there that Christ would appear to "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15 24). Then Christ himself will cease to exercise even his own authority, which is now uniquely manifest in the Christian communities where the missionaries are laboring, but which in the time of the consummation is to be completely surrendered to God; "then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15 28).

The Tübingen scholars and their followers, in making him so emphatically the advocate of an absolute religion for the gentile world at large, have passed too lightly over the Jewish leanings of Paul. They turned the spotlight effectively upon his controversy with the legalists, but unfortunately they left other important aspects of the apostle's thought and interest quite too much in the shadow. Indeed, one might question whether Paul's contention for the freedom of gentile Christians from the Mosaic law of circumcision was so primary and fundamental in his own consciousness as it has been made to seem by the majority of his modern interpreters. Apparently the outbreak of the controversy itself was something of an accident and quite surprising to both Paul and Barnabas. This situation would not give us the impression that Paul immediately upon his conversion had

thought through the whole issue, making it the basal concept of his new faith and building about it a distinctive system of Christian theology.

One might say that for Paul the legalistic controversy had been forced upon him by an unhappy accident. The social situation conditioning his efforts to win the Jews of the Dispersion to Christ had necessitated the habit of associating with gentile friends, made first among the class of "God-fearers" and later from people quite outside the Jewish synagogue. When violently treated by his Jewish kinsmen but received favorably into the house of a Gentile, who already had experienced under Paul's preaching the same type of spiritual elevation that Paul himself enjoyed, the apostle is not likely to have concerned himself very seriously with the question of a gentile convert's circumcision. That issue was forced upon him from without by the more conservative and less widely experienced believers of Palestine. The practice of freedom had automatically established itself in the Pauline communities, but now that it was subjected to attack a formal justification of the procedure had to be devised. This was the setting that threw into the foreground of attention the controversy over faith as a sufficient substitute for obedience to the Law. One might quite reasonably doubt whether that issue, as a definitely focal point in the Christian scheme of things, had previously been deliberately faced by Paul. His conversion experience had been, not primarily a matter of theological reflection, but an immediate sense of attachment to the risen Lord, who had miraculously appeared to him on the road to Damascus. To portray this risen Jesus triumphant over the cross and the grave, and immediately powerful through the operations of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples, was the central theme of the Pauline missionary preaching. Even after the legalistic controversy had been forced upon him, he could still epitomize the whole Christian message in the statement: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10 9).

Paul's vehemence in contending for the rights of faith over the demands of the legalists has served excellently the cause of a predominantly gentile Christianity in later ages. Perhaps it is not unnatural to assume that he had designed this result; and also that the didactic technique which he later employed to meet a specific situation had been fundamental with him from the very outset. But such is probably not the case. The evidence that Paul had no other outlook for Christianity than that it should share in an early triumph of the Jewish people through the return of a distinctly Jewish Savior, Jesus the exalted Messiah, to fulfil an unmistakably Jewish type of eschatological expectation, seems perfectly clear from abundant data contained in the Pauline letters. At best, freedom from the law of circumcision applied only to gentile believers, and these constituted in Paul's day by no means the majority, or at least it was not his intention that in future the gentile converts should outnumber the Jews who would be loyal to the triumphant Christ. In this respect we may say that Paul had an emphatically Jewish bias.

That radical change of perspective by which Christianity came to regard itself as an affair of the gentile world, with the Jews largely rejected from its privileges, was an attainment not of the Pauline but of the post-Pauline age, and the bridge by which the new religion crossed from Palestine to the gentile world was not that of Pauline anti-legalism. There were in fact two other routes which proved far more attractive. One favored way of justifying the gentile character of the new religion was to stress a literal fulfilment and keeping of the Law, an attitude quite out of harmony with Paul's feeling. This disposition had already manifested itself in his day among the Romans and had called forth his sharp rebuke. But ultimately it found effective and permanent expression for the Christian church in the Gospel of Matthew. Here the full Jewish Scriptures became a strictly Christian authority, fulfilled and supplemented by the legislation of the new lawgiver, Jesus, who is thus the authentic successor and interpreter of Moses. The Jewish people have now been

completely ejected from their heritage, while the Christian ideal of conduct is absolute conformity to this ancient revelation rebaptized in accordance with distinctively Christian interests.

Still a second expedient, very successfully employed in effecting Christianity's transition from Jewish to gentile soil, was the representation of the earthly Jesus as an incarnation of deity. This is effectively accomplished in the Fourth Gospel. It is safe to say that Paul would have sharply disagreed with this book had it been known in his day, just as he would have disagreed with the Gospel of Matthew. But his disagreement with the Johannine gospel would have been for a different reason. Probably we are right in feeling that the Fourth Gospel is closer in spirit to Paul than is the Gospel of Matthew. Yet there is no ignoring the fact that its author has very radically altered the Pauline type of eschatology, and is much more severe than the apostle ever was in criticism of the Jewish people. The point of agreement between Paul and John lies mainly in the idea of Christ's preexistence. But when it comes to the incarnation of this preexistent being, immediately the respective opinions of the apostle and the evangelist radically diverge.

Paul's incarnate Savior is entirely subordinated to the Hebrew God, and displays while upon earth traits of remarkable humility. When he triumphs over death it is not through his own virtue, and even his later exercise of heavenly lordship over the Christian community is a gift that has been bestowed upon him by God. It is God who has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name. Paul could hardly have condemned Jewish contemporaries of Jesus for failing to perceive that he was to be their glorious Savior. They had known him only after the flesh, and such acquaintanceship had not been designed to produce obedience and adoration. That attitude had been made possible only through the crucifixion and subsequent happenings. Paul never asked his audiences to believe on an earthly Jesus. Salvation was conditioned solely upon belief in a heaven-exalted Christ. That the establishment of gentile

Christianity was to be justified on the ground of Jewish rejection of the earthly Jesus was not a fundamental Pauline conception.

On the other hand, for the author of the Fourth Gospel, the justification for gentile Christianity lay exactly in the fact that the earthly Jesus had made so brilliant a display of his heavenly credentials that the failure of his Jewish contemporaries to believe in him was the peculiar sin that marked them for eternal doom. Jesus is represented as exhibiting even while on earth an equality with the Hebrew God that probably would have been quite distasteful to Paul, even to Paul the devout Christian. The Johannine picture would have wounded his Jewish sensibilities. But for the Fourth evangelist, the earthly Jesus seems entirely justified in making himself one with Deity, a prerogative that even the preexistent Christ of Paul's faith might not fittingly covet. But for many Gentiles the Johannine Christ, being an actual incarnation of divinity, was a much more suitable figure in whom to trust for salvation, than was either the new Moses of the first evangelist or the Pauline apocalyptic Messiah destined the moment his triumph was complete to surrender everything to the God of the Jews.

Students have often noted the relative absence of specifically Pauline influence on the gentile Christianity of the second generation. If we regard Paul as the real founder of the gentile church, or even as its "second founder," his failure to dominate more effectively his immediate successors is a puzzling phenomenon. This difficulty becomes more easily explicable, however, when one recognizes the strong Jewish bias of Paul and the utter absence from his thinking of any intention to establish a permanent gentile Christianity. But in later times when the new movement had made itself fully at home among Gentiles and cherished the ideal of a complete break with Judaism, it found in Paul two serious embarrassments. He was too anti-biblical and too pro-Jewish. In defending his practice of admitting Gentiles into Christianity without requiring circumcision, he had developed a dangerous attitude in favor of ignoring certain

portions of those Scriptures which had now become the great charter of the growing gentile church. Also, in picturing the missionary program as the ingathering of a few gentile converts to join the great host of Jewish redeemed who would greet Christ at his coming, Paul had inverted the process of historical development that was now daily verifying itself more and more clearly in the actual experience of the second generation of gentile Christians. They still looked for Christ's advent, but they, and not the men of Jewish blood, were to inherit the kingdom.

If we have correctly read Paul's mind it was not his intention to found a predominantly gentile Christianity, but to help rescue a few Gentiles who were privileged by the generosity of the Hebrew God to share in the blessings of salvation that still belonged peculiarly to the Jewish race. But on this assumption how are we to account for the manifestly Hellenistic features that characterize Pauline Christianity? Our answer is that they are expedients, like his argument against circumcision, employed to induce Gentiles to share, and help to bring to realization, the perfect Judaism, as Paul might have called Christianity. Had he remained a rabbi of the Dispersion, possibly he would have followed a similar line of procedure in persuading Gentiles to share God-ordained privileges with the future of the Jewish race. We have no reason to suppose that his zeal for missionary propaganda was a peculiarly Christian acquisition. It is true that if he had not accepted Christ he would have found it more difficult to furnish his audiences with the figure of a hero-savior capable of making a successful appeal to Gentiles. But his conversion to belief in the lordship of the risen Jesus did not necessarily involve any radical change in the relative status of Gentile and Jew in God's scheme of redemption. It simply made the eternal purposes of the Almighty more easy of realization. Perhaps, indeed, just because Paul had always been of the opinion that a select number of Gentiles were to inherit Jewish privileges, did he find it possible to adapt himself to gentile ways. Both his abandonment of circumcision and his borrowings from the Hellenistic cults

are glowing testimony to the seriousness with which he undertook to make known to Gentiles the kindly attitude of the Hebrew God toward a less favored people. The more closely he came to grips with this task the more effective in his hands did he find the characteristic tools of gentile religions to be. By this process, though probably quite unawares, Paul was being transformed into a Greek religionist, but he himself had no thought of disloyalty to that true Judaism which he conceived his Christianity to be.