

The Gospel in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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PREFACE

These lectures were given during the Vacation Term for Biblical Study held in Cambridge in August 1949. The main theme for study was 'The Divine Plan of Redemption'. In dealing with the Epistle to the Hebrews I endeavoured to allow the Epistle to speak for itself and to present its great themes in the context in which the Epistle has come down to us, i.e. as an important part of the divine revelation contained in Scripture as a whole. To this end I have sought to use scholarship as the handmaid of exegesis; to refrain from sitting in any way in judgment upon the Epistle; and also to shun the fruitless task of separating those elements in it which may happen to be congenial to 'the modern mind' from those which many in our day would lay aside as the discredited reflections of a mental outlook of a bygone age. A Christian scholar who believes that the Bible consists of a record of a period of history, which is *sacred* history because in it God chose to make a unique self-disclosure of Himself, can adopt no other course.

As part of the revealed Word of God, this Epistle has a divine message for men and women in every age and in every circumstance. It may, however, be said to have a special message for our own generation, in so far that the circumstances of the original readers of it seem strangely parallel to our own.

New life will be breathed into the dry bones of formal churchmanship; and 'religious' activities will be prevented from becoming 'dead works' only if those who profess and call themselves 'Christians' look to Jesus first and foremost as 'the Apostle and High Priest of their confession', through whose atoning sacrifice and sanctifying activity God's purpose to 'bring many sons to glory' is being effected. Certain it is, as the writer of this Epistle so clearly saw, that nothing less than this will prevent apostasy in the day when the followers of Christ are called to 'resist unto blood striving against sin'. For these reasons the 'word of exhortation' contained in this Epistle must be listened to with very special attention. If my studies should, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, help in some measure to achieve that end, the labour expended upon them will not have been in vain.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Epistle to the Hebrews was excluded by modern critical scholarship from the Corpus Paulinum, the tendency has been to regard it as unique among the books of the New Testament. Like the Melchizedek of whom it speaks, it has been considered to be 'without father, without mother and without lineage'; unique in its literary form, being not only devoid of any introductory address but also interspersing doctrinal teaching with practical exhortation

in a manner found nowhere else in the Epistles of the New Testament; unique also in the eloquence of its author and in the excellence of his Greek, so that it is the document of the New Testament in which the classical scholar finds himself linguistically most at home; and unique also in its theology. Some have called it a tractate on a single theme written for some small coterie of Christians; others a semi-philosophical reinterpretation of the significance of Jesus suggested by the language of Philo about the *Logos*. In either case the document would appear to be regarded as outside the main stream of primitive Christianity. As E. F. Scott has recently written: 'The opinion still persists that the Epistle lies outside the main current of Christian thought, and is the work of some teacher who held views peculiar to himself and to a small forgotten circle'.¹

It is, however, quite certain that those whose evaluation of the Epistle ultimately led to its acceptance as a canonical book did not hold any such view. The Epistle, as is generally known, after its use by Clement of Rome in A.D. 96 subsequently fell into ill-favour in the West owing partly to doubts about its apostolic authority and partly to the wrong interpretation of its teaching about post-baptismal repentance given by the Novatian heretics. Tertullian valued it as an Epistle of Barnabas, but it is excluded both negatively and positively from the list of books contained in the Muratorian Fragment, written at Rome and usually dated about A.D. 170, for the writer asserts that Paul

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wrote to seven churches only. It was ultimately accepted as a Pauline Epistle, however, through the influence of the great Alexandrian scholars Clement and Origen. Men of old time, Origen asserts (and he clearly has the highest respect for this ancient tradition), have handed down the Epistle as an Epistle of Paul. Origen was unable to accept the view of his predecessor Clement that the Epistle was a Greek translation, made by Luke or someone else, of an original Hebrew document written by Paul, and he recognized that the elegance of the language did not harmonize with the self-confessed inelegance of Paul's speech. Nevertheless he was so far from thinking that the theological content of the Epistle was of a different order from that of the acknowledged Pauline letters that his own final judgment was that 'the thoughts are Paul's but the phraseology belongs to another, who recorded the Apostle's thoughts and produced a scholarly reproduction of what his master said.' Who this recorder was, he added, 'God alone knows.' This attitude of the great Alexandrian scholar is probably reflected in the unique position which the Epistle occupies in the recently discovered Chester Beatty Papyrus of the third century, where it follows the Epistle to the Romans as the second Epistle in the Corpus Paulinum. It has indeed been suggested that the order of the Epistles in this papyrus is due mainly to the consideration of length, but the place of this Epistle in the manuscripts seems to vary in accordance with the importance assigned to it. The great uncial MSS. of the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus reflect *some doubt* as to the place which Hebrews should occupy in the Corpus Paulinum, by placing it after the acknowledged Epistles and before the Pastorals, a position which it occupies in the Greek Testament of Hort. The authorities for the Western text reflect the *still greater* doubt which was felt in the West, by inserting the Epistle after the Pastorals and before the Catholic Epistles, a position which it occupies in the Vulgate and in our standard English versions. The Chester Beatty Papyrus, the oldest collection which we possess of the Pauline Epistles, inserts Hebrews in a place which is entirely consonant with what we know to have been the estimate placed upon it in Eastern Christendom at the close of the second century. It was a Pauline Epistle second in value only to the Apostle's *magnum opus*, the Epistle to the Romans. It was

¹ *Varieties of New Testament Religion*, p. 222.

this evaluation of the document by the eastern fathers which greatly moved St. Augustine, and led to its acceptance as Pauline in the West. The view

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put forward by Pantaenus, the founder of the Catechetical school at Alexandria, that the absence of Paul's name was due to the Apostle's modesty because the Lord Himself was sent to the Hebrews, while Paul was an apostle of the Gentiles and was writing to the Hebrews as an act of supererogation, lingered on in the West and is found in the prefaces to the Epistle in many MSS. of the Latin Vulgate. In the Roman Catholic Church the Epistle is still regarded as Pauline, though scholars are free to discuss the extent to which another mind and another pen may have contributed to the Epistle's literary form.

I do not intend in these lectures to seek to defend the Pauline authorship of the Epistle; though I think conservative scholars are right to point out that the external evidence has not always in recent years been given its due weight; and that it is not improbable that the over-analytical mind of modern critical scholarship has too readily assumed that, because the language and style of the Epistle are in some respects un-Pauline, the thought must also be that of another. Had St. Paul been concerned to develop the contrast between the sacrificial death of Christ and the Levitical system of sacrifice, just as he had in Romans contrasted law and grace, we cannot say that he could not have done so along the lines of this Epistle: and as for the use made in the Epistle of the story of Melchizedek, who can set any limits to the exegetical powers of the converted Jew who had sat at the feet of Gamaliel?

But, while I do not wish to suggest that the denial of the Pauline authorship of Hebrews is *not* one of the more assured results of critical scholarship since the Reformation, I am concerned to try to show that this Epistle, as all the documents in the New Testament, including the Pauline Epistles, is true to the primitive preaching as a whole, whatever its date and its provenance and whoever its author or the first recipients may have been. It lays greater emphasis upon certain implications of that preaching than upon others in view of the particular circumstances of the readers, but this is a feature which it has in common with every other contribution to the New Testament.

Prof. C. H. Dodd, in his book entitled *The Bible Today*, has drawn our attention to the common and generally recognized pattern of the 'proclamation' which constituted the gospel of primitive Christianity. In so doing he has helped us to see what previous critical scholarship so often lost sight of, the essential unity of the New Testament. And it is under four headings,

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similar to those suggested by Prof. Dodd, which not inadequately describe what appear to be persistent elements in the primitive *kerugma*, that I propose to consider the subject-matter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. These headings are: (i) The Preparation, (ii) The Fulfilment, (iii) The Consequences, and (iv) The Appeal.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PREPARATION

The early Christian preaching was emphatic that what had happened in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus was 'according to the Scriptures'. In other words it fitted into the divinely appointed scheme of things. Every document in the New Testament, with the possible exception of 1 John, emphasizes the truth that the Old Testament Scriptures contain a record of the purposes of God spoken to the Fathers and the prophets of the Jewish race, which found their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus the Christ. No New Testament writer states this more clearly than the author of our Epistle. In his very first sentence, from a literary point of view the grandest sentence in the New Testament, he asserts that the God, who had spoken in many diverse and fragmentary ways to the fathers through the prophets, had at the end of the long days of waiting and preparation finally spoken 'by his Son' (i. 1, 2).

However, the Old Testament Scriptures contain not merely a record of the past, but a living and abiding word of God which confronts humanity at every age with something which it could never have discovered by the light of human reason or as a result of observation. The word of God, says our writer, is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing to the innermost recesses of the human personality whither only God can penetrate (iv. 12). And this word, embodied in the sacred Scriptures, *is* so fraught with life and energy, because it contains above all else the revelation of 'the unchangeable character of God's purpose' (τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς αὐτοῦ) for the human race (vi. 17). What is this purpose? it is well described by our author in the expression 'to bring many Sons to glory' (ii. 10). In other words God, 'for whom and through whom are all things,' and whose concern for and sympathy with His human creation is so great that He can be described, as our author describes Him in xii. 9, in the words used by Moses in his prayer to God after the rebellion of Korah (Nu. xvi. 22) as 'the Father of men's spirits', this Creator-Father God wills to have an adopted family consisting of redeemed members of the human race, who will be able to fulfil the destiny which He had in mind for them, when in the words of the eighth Psalm (quoted

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in chapters vi, vii) He made them 'nearly equal to the angels', and placed them in the specially privileged position of exercising sovereignty over the created order. God had made man in His own image with the power of reflecting His own nature even to the extent of displaying something of His own sovereignty. He had 'put all things in subjection under his feet'. But that power, our writer assumes (as indeed the whole of the New Testament assumes), man had lost at the fall. As the Rabbis put it, man had 'lost the glory'. Although the Epistle to the Hebrews does not dwell upon the origin of sin, as Paul does in the Epistle to the Romans, it is an essential presupposition of it that man is in a fallen state. The deliverance that had therefore to be effected before God's purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory' could become a reality was a deliverance of those who 'through fear of death (and it was sin that caused this fear) were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (ii. 15).

The Old Testament is the record of how God, instead of destroying the entire human creation, as He might well have done, for His holiness is such that when confronted with evil He can be truly described as 'a consuming fire' (xii. 29), chose to intervene in human history as a 'God of peace', as He is described in xiii. 20, to enable mankind, which necessarily stood under His condemnation, to regain the status that it had lost, the status of divine sonship. This merciful

liberating work God proposed to effect through One who would be 'of the seed of Abraham', and in whom perfect divine sonship would be manifested. Definite historical expression of His plan of salvation began to be given through the promises made to Abraham who was specially called to receive them. Abraham thus occupies a primary position in Biblical revelation; though before Abraham's days witness had been given in the stories of Abel, Enoch, and Noah to the kind of relationship which God desired to establish between mankind and Himself.

The story of Abel testifies to the truth that God does not wish to be estranged from His creation and that He is ready to accept human offerings that are made to Him if they are made in the right spirit and are prompted by gratitude. Just as it was recorded in Genesis that the blood of Abel shed by Cain 'cried out from the ground', so though Abel is dead there is a word of God permanently being spoken every time his story is read with the eyes of faith (xi. 4). In Enoch the true destiny of man was again partially revealed. Man was created not to live in fear of

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God, nor in a state of estrangement from Him, nor to be the victim of death, but to have fellowship with God, even as Enoch was translated into heaven that he might not see death. In the Hebrew of Gn. v. 24 it is stated that Enoch 'walked with God'. Our writer, quoting from the Septuagint, states that he 'pleased God', and suggests that the ground for his acceptance was that he believed not only in the existence of God, as all who would draw near to God must do, but also that all who truly sought after God would find in Him a reward for their search. They would enjoy Him for ever. Similarly the story of Noah bears abiding witness to the truth that God's ultimate purpose is the salvation of mankind, and that He works out that purpose through those, however few they may be, who respond to Him in faith.

It was indeed the first axiom of the early preachers of the gospel that, as Paul put it in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch, 'the God of this people Israel had chosen our fathers' and had chosen Abraham in particular to be the progenitor of a race which would be peculiarly His people. Our writer, though he does not treat the subject chronologically, does in fact draw attention to the several stages in the historical process by which this people of God was preparing the way for the final fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham in One who was of the seed of Abraham. These promises were made, our author asserts, under the most solemn circumstances. God being unable to swear by anyone greater than Himself swore by Himself, that by two unchangeable things, His promise and His oath, there might be an indisputable guarantee that because of Abraham's obedience God would never fail to bestow blessings upon his posterity (vi. 14-16). Abraham himself witnessed the first fulfilment of these promises in the birth of Sarah's child and his faith in their further fulfilment in the future was not shattered even when 'he who had received the promises' received the command to offer up in sacrifice the child of promise, apart from whom, humanly speaking, there seemed no possibility of those promises being realized (xi. 17, 18).

In the age of Abraham, our writer maintains, a clear intimation was given of the nature of the channel through which these divine blessings, so lavishly promised, would be bestowed. They would be mediated to mankind through a human person, living in a concrete historical situation, yet belonging to the eternal world. A mysterious figure (see Gn. xiv) accosted Abraham as

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he returned from the slaughter of the kings, a figure of whose birth and death there was no mention. He came we know not whence; he went we know not whither. He seemed like a figure from another world who appeared for a brief passage in time in order to perform one great significant action. After receiving from Abraham (who at once recognized his vast superiority to himself) a tenth of all the spoils, he bestowed 'a blessing upon the patriarch and went his way. His very name is of profound significance to our author. He was Melchizedek, King of Righteousness. And Salem, the name of the city over which he was said to reign, meant 'peace'. Scripture also designated him as 'priest of the most high God' (vii. 1ff.). In this incident there was an historical manifestation of the truth that God in 'bringing many sons to glory', in working out His plan for man's salvation would achieve His purpose through One unique in origin, in character, and in dignity, who would perform the function of reconciling as a righteous Mediator sinful man and the all-holy God, and so reign as King of Peace over a redeemed humanity. The significance of the mysterious story of Melchizedek had not passed unnoticed in previous Hebrew tradition, for the writer of Psalm cx had prefigured the coming of a unique Priest, whose priestly work would abide for ever for He Himself was eternal, in the words constantly quoted by our writer, 'Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'

In the person and work of Moses further light was thrown upon the nature of the final intervention which God would make in one who 'was of the seed of Abraham' and 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek', for the purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory'. Moses the first saviour and educator of Israel was called and empowered by God to liberate the Hebrew tribes from bondage in Egypt, and to weld them into a people by instructing them in the revelation of the divine will which he received directly from God Himself at Sinai. The distinctiveness of Moses' work was made clear in Nu. xii. 8 when God informed Aaron and Miriam, when they rebelled against Moses, that while He would make Himself known to other prophets 'in dreams and visions', He would speak with Moses 'mouth to mouth and not in dark speeches'. Moses thus prefigured in a unique manner the coming of Him who many centuries later was reported to have said: 'The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works' (Jn. xiv. 10). The words that God spake

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unto Moses were also His works. In them He was setting forth the great truth that the law must precede the gospel; that God cannot 'bring many sons to glory' till they have learned to obey His will and recognized, in the words of Heb. ii. 2, that 'every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution'. Moses discharged the duties laid upon him of 'attending upon God's household', our writer notes (iii. 1-6), with the utmost fidelity. His faithfulness was that of a true servant who testified loyally to all that he was told by God to say; and, as the words 'for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken' in iii. 5 seem also to imply, he pointed in the divine revelation, which he himself was commissioned to give, to a fuller revelation that was to come. The very sufferings that fell to his lot as one of the afflicted people of Israel in Egypt, and later on at the hands of his own followers, were a foreshadowing of the reproach which afterwards God's Messiah would be called upon to endure (xi. 26).

But Moses was not only called upon to educate the Israelites in the *moral* law. He was also bidden to instruct them how they could venture to draw nigh, sinners though they were, to the

all-holy God. He was commissioned to inaugurate and to regulate the sacrifices of Israel according to the pattern shown to him on the mount (see Ex. xxv. 40; Heb. viii. 5). He was thus enabled to have more than a glimpse of the truth that it would be through the offering of a perfect sacrifice that God's purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory' would ultimately be realized: and that 'without the shedding of blood there could be no forgiveness' (ix. 22). In the tent of meeting, which Moses pitched without the camp during the wanderings in the wilderness, and in which the Lord had spoken with him in special intimacy, the divine presence being symbolized by the pillar of cloud which descended upon it (Ex. xxxiii. 7-10), the Israelites learned to understand that it was God's will that men should have communion with Himself. In this way a real preparation was made for the ultimate tabernacling of the Son of God in human flesh in the Person of Jesus. The fact that the author of Hebrews does not speak of this divine tabernacling in the shrine of Christ's body does not necessarily signify that he would have rejected the idea, as Canon Phythian-Adams in an unsympathetic evaluation of our Epistle in the appendix of his book *The People and the Presence* (p. 288) seems to suggest.

This emphasis upon the importance of the work of Abraham

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and Moses in preparing the way for Christ, which is a marked feature of the Epistle to the Hebrews, even though the writer is primarily concerned to show the superiority of the work of Jesus to both, is an emphasis by no means peculiar to this document. In varying degrees it constituted an important element in the different presentations of the primitive gospel which are found in the New Testament. Nothing could be clearer in this respect than the statement of Paul, 'Jesus Christ became the minister of circumcision for the truth of God — to confirm the promises made to the fathers' (Rom. xv. 8), but perhaps the closest parallel to our Epistle is to be found in the speech of Stephen in Acts vii. The appearance of 'the God of glory to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia', which is part of the opening statement, is clearly regarded as the first great manifestation of the redemptive activity of God, and Stephen subsequently demonstrates how the promises of God to Abraham (on which such emphasis is placed in Hebrews) were fulfilled in the multiplying of Abraham's descendants, till under Moses they were indeed God's people. The faithful work of Moses as a minister in God's household, designated in Stephen's speech 'the ecclesia in the wilderness'; the reception by Moses at angels' hands of the divine law; the proclamation to the people of the 'living oracles' which he had received from God Himself; the establishment of the tent of witness in the wilderness, fashioned after the pattern which Moses had seen on the mount — all these are features common to the Epistle to the Hebrews and the preaching of Stephen. Stephen carries on his description of the sacred history through Joshua and David to Solomon. For our writer the periods of Joshua and David are also of great significance.

The comparative peace which the Israelites ultimately obtained in the reign of King David after the long wanderings in the wilderness and the hard-won conquest of Canaan constituted in our author's historical perspective another stage in the disclosure of the nature of what God had in mind when He purposed 'to bring many sons to glory'. The Israelites had good news proclaimed to them that there was a 'rest' and an 'inheritance' awaiting them in the land unto which the Lord was going to bring them (Heb. iv. 2; Dt. xii. 9): but the message did not meet with faith in those who heard it (iv. 2, reading the nominative *συγκεκερασμένοος* with Codex Sinaiticus). They showed none of 'the obedience which springs from faith' which had

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been so conspicuously manifested by the patriarchs; and their disobedience placed them for forty years under God's wrath. Many of them in consequence failed to enter the promised land, while those who did reach their goal were prevented from finding there the realization of the 'rest' which God had in store for mankind. As the writer of Psalm xciv (a Psalm which occupies a cardinal place in the thought of our writer) put it later: God had 'sworn in his wrath' that that generation of Israelites should not enter into His rest. But a divine promise once made cannot fail ultimately to receive fulfilment. God cannot deny Himself: the promise of entering into rest therefore remained. God indeed could 'bring many sons to glory' only by enabling them to enter the rest which He Himself enjoyed, the rest not of idleness or inaction, but the rest which was the perfection of activity. To have fellowship with God means to 'enter into his rest'.

Our writer uses other language also to describe the nature of the final destiny which God had in mind for a redeemed humanity. At one time he speaks of it as 'the world which is to come' (ii. 5); and at another time as a 'city which hath foundations whose architect and builder is God' (xi. 10), a city towards which the pilgrim patriarchs were ever moving. 'Entering into God's rest' is, however, his most characteristic expression: and his special contribution to the subject is that he equates the 'rest' spoken of in Psalm xciv as *κατάπαυσις* with 'the rest' into which God Himself entered when He had finished the work of creation (Gn. ii. 2 quoted in Heb. iv. 4) — a 'sabbath rest' for which he appears to have coined the word *σαββατισμός* (iv. 9). In other words, the institution of the Sabbath plays, in our writer's view, an important part in the working out of God's purposes. On every Sabbath the Israelite could look forward to the fulfilment of the promise that one day God would allow him to enter into His own rest, and enjoy unbroken harmony and perfect peace. This, however, could take place only after the redeeming work had been accomplished by one who could be described in the words of Psalm cx. 4 as 'a priest after the order of Melchizedek'. The Sabbath therefore had a twofold significance. It drew men's attention, as in the Exodus version of the fourth commandment (Ex. xx. 11), to the divine sabbath rest, into which God had entered and would one day allow the redeemed to enter; and it also reminded them, as in the Deuteronomic version of the same commandment (Dt. v. 15), that with-

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out redemption from sin there could be no entry into that rest, for of that redemption the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt was a permanent symbol.

But if it was lack of faith which prevented the rest of God from being enjoyed in Canaan by the Israelites who entered in under the leadership of Joshua (viii. 9), it was disobedience, partly wilful and partly inevitable, which rendered the covenant between God and the patriarchs incapable of bringing about the salvation which God had purposed for mankind. As a result, God foretold through His prophet Jeremiah, in a key passage of the Old Testament quoted at length by our author in chapter viii, the inauguration by Himself of a new and better covenant with His people. As is well known, the Septuagint significantly translates the Hebrew word for 'covenant' not by the ordinary Greek word *συνθήκη* (a rendering which might have given the impression that the covenants between God and man were agreements entered into by the parties on equal terms), but by the word *διαθήκη* which means a 'testament' or 'will' or 'disposition of property'. The Biblical covenants between God and man, though they call for obedience and faith on man's part, are essentially divine dispositions,

manifestations of His saving grace. In these covenants, though there are two parties, there is one disposer. Our writer does not refer to the covenants between God and Noah and between God and Abraham described in Genesis ix and Genesis xv respectively; but he regards the covenant mediated by Moses and described in Exodus xxiv. 6-8 as of great significance in the working out of God's intention 'to bring many sons to glory'.

The covenant of law inaugurated by Moses at Sinai, when he sprinkled with blood the book of the covenant and the people, had two purposes which might at first sight appear contradictory. On the one hand, it emphasized the necessity that man should be obedient to God and do what was righteous in His eyes if His divine purposes were to be realized. On the other hand, it served to bring home to men by bitter experience the truth, so galling to human pride, that man could not obtain by obedience to law the righteousness which God demanded. The old covenant was thus educative but not redemptive. It succeeded paradoxically by being a failure. For as our author puts it, 'the law made nothing perfect' (vii. 19). The gifts and offerings which were made under its sacrificial system could never make perfect the worshippers (ix. 9, x. 1). That system, how-

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ever, was beneficial in so far as it reminded man continually of his sinful state (x. 3).

It was therefore when the old covenant 'was growing old and nigh unto vanishing away' (viii. 13) because its inherent impotence was manifest; when the old Israel, having failed again and again to abide by its precepts, was in the process of disintegration at the time of the Babylonian captivity, that God revealed to Jeremiah his intention of inaugurating a new and better covenant with His people. The covenant which He had made with their fathers, when He took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, in achieving a nearer end had failed to gain the final end which He had in mind. The people had in fact not continued in that covenant even though, as the Hebrew text of Je. xxxi. 32 stated, God had been 'an husband unto them'. Our author, in quoting that verse in viii. 9, quotes it in the Septuagint form 'and so I paid no heed to them'. God allowed them to go their own way and to realize the results of disobedience. But His 'neglect' of them was only temporary. In His infinite love and patience He purposed to put His laws into men's minds, and write them on their hearts, so that He might be in reality their God and they His people (see Je. xxxi. 33).

The difference between the Mosaic covenant and this new covenant predicted by Jeremiah has been well stated by Du Bose, who wrote: 'The difference between the two dispositions or dispensations is the very vital one between a law, obedience, or righteousness *exacted* and the same *conferred* or *imparted*; between a righteousness in us, or rather impossible in us, of our own selves ... and a righteousness in us, possible and actual,... because it is of God in us.'² The covenant of law had the effect of exposing the wide separation that exists between sinful man and the all-holy God; but under the new covenant men would discover in the realm of personal experience that they were now close to God. 'They shall not teach every one his fellow or every one his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest.' How could such an experience be rendered possible? It would become possible, because God would make divine provision for the removal of the guilt of sin which had hitherto constituted the barrier between man and God. So the great prophecy of Jeremiah ends with the assurance: 'I will be merciful toward their

² *High Priesthood and Sacrifice*, p. 160.

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iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more' (see Heb. viii. 12).

Through whom would the experience foretold by Jeremiah be brought about? As we have already noticed, our author is very sure that the Old Testament accurately forecasts the answer to that question. It will be through one who was human, for it was to man that God's blessings were promised, and only through a *man* could they be mediated; one who would be of the seed of Abraham, for it was to Abraham that the divine promises were first given articulate expression; one who would manifest in himself the righteousness which God demanded in the ordinances of the Mosaic covenant, but which no man yet had been able to achieve; one who by very virtue of that righteousness would be able to offer a sacrifice so perfect that its effects would abide for ever; one who could be mystically described in the words of Psalm cx as 'a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek'; one, in a word, who would realize in Himself the purpose which God had in mind for mankind, by living under human conditions a life of *sonship* in unbroken communion with Himself.

As we noticed at the outset, it is in One designated as 'Son' that our writer, as he states in the great opening sentence of his Epistle, believes the final intervention of God to have taken place. And it is to the advent of such a Son that he believes that the quotation he makes from Psalm ii in i. 5 (a quotation made in identically the same form in Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch, Acts xiii. 33) is in reality pointing, when it speaks of God begetting one who was worthy of the high title of Son. The psalm originally referred to a Jewish king, perhaps David himself, who, relying on his dependence of sonship upon God, was enabled to win victory over his foes. Similarly the writer of Psalm xlv, quoted by our author in i. 8, 9, had spoken of a king who would exercise his kingship in righteousness, and who, as a result, would be 'anointed' by God and stand out as an 'anointed' one or 'Christ' above his fellows.

One day, so our writer pictures the Old Testament as saying, another begotten Son of God would appear on the human scene, of the lineage of David, who would display perfectly all that sonship had meant in the best of the kings of Israel; and, after having offered His perfect sacrifice as 'a priest after the order of Melchizedek', He would reign co-equal with God until every evil power was overthrown; for to Him there would be given

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the divine summons, also stated in Psalm cx, 'Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.'

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CHAPTER II

THE FULFILMENT

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written, as the title implies, to *Hebrew* Christians. This title is known to have been attached to the Epistle in the days of Origen and Tertullian. It is found in the Chester Beatty Papyrus of the early third century and, though we cannot be certain that it was the superscription of the author, it probably correctly designates the first recipients. The

writer himself describes his work in xiii. 22 as ‘a word of exhortation’ (λόγος παρακλήσεως) the exhortation being made up of warning, encouragement, and comfort, as the word παρακλήσις implies, but all presented in the light of the Christian gospel.

It is interesting to notice that the identical expression is found in Acts xiii. 15, where the invitation to the apostles Paul and Barnabas to speak in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch is conveyed in the words, ‘Brethren, if you have a word of exhortation to the people, say it.’ The synagogue authorities felt that these visitors might well be able to give some exposition of Scripture which would stimulate the faith and confirm the hope of the worshippers, and in response Paul delivered a discourse which was in fact ‘a word of exhortation’. He reviewed the history of Israel, showing that it formed the preparation for the gospel which he and the other Christian preachers were proclaiming. The discourse, so far as it went, followed the general pattern of the primitive *kerugma* as it is presented in Peter’s speech on the day of Pentecost, or in the speech delivered by Stephen which, as we have already noticed, has distinct parallels with the Epistle to the Hebrews. These considerations should prevent us from looking upon this Epistle as an interesting supplement to the primitive *kerugma* written for a select body of Christians, rather than as an exposition of it of vital significance for all. Christian *paraclēsis* did not consist solely of moral exhortation, but necessarily involved a proclamation of the gospel, without which the ethical appeal would have rested on no sound foundation and would have had no validity.

The Epistle itself gives a fairly clear indication of the purpose for which it was composed. We shall have to consider the situation of the readers more fully later. At present let us notice that

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these Hebrews were allowing themselves to ‘drift’, through a failure to pay constant heed to the gospel which they had originally received and accepted (ii. 1). Spiritually they had ‘stopped growing’ (v. 12) and had failed to reach a mature understanding of the faith they professed; therefore that faith was no longer supplying them with adequate nourishment. To prevent them from ‘falling away’ altogether (vi. 6) the author seeks to expound to them the uniqueness of the Person and work of Jesus, so that they may press on to maturity. It is no addition to the gospel that he is presenting but an elaboration of the essential truth latent in it, an elaboration made in such a manner as he feels is most likely to appeal to Hebrew Christians placed in a situation in which doubtless many Hebrew Christians of the second generation may have found themselves. A general staleness and a sense of disillusionment had set in and religious phrases and ceremonies had become, as they so easily can become, meaningless and lifeless. How could new life be instilled into the dry bones? The problem was not confined to the first recipients of this letter; it is the perennial problem of Christendom.

The writer gives an interesting summary of what he describes in vi. 1 as elementary Christian truth τόν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ χριστοῦ λόγον, and in v. 12 as the ABC of Christianity, τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ, which these Hebrew Christians had accepted many years ago, though for all practical purposes they had forgotten it. He enumerates five elements without which there could be no Christian life at all: (i) repentance from dead works; (ii) faith in God; (iii) teaching about baptism and the laying-on-of-hands; (iv) the resurrection of the dead; (v) eternal judgment. If διδασχῆν is read in vi. 1, as it probably should be with the Chester Beatty Papyrus, Codex Vaticanus and the Old Latin for διδασχῆς, repentance from dead works and faith in God are equated with the teaching that underlies and gives meaning to

baptism and the laying-on-of-hands. The very process of becoming a Christian involved in the case of converts from Judaism, such as were the readers of our Epistle, an abandonment of the attempt to Obtain righteousness by seeking to obey the precepts of a lifeless moral code, and the acceptance by faith of the righteousness which is freely offered in Christ; just as in the case of converts from paganism it involved 'turning from dumb idols to serve the true and living God', as Paul puts it in 1 Thes. i. 9. This renouncing of a past

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way of life, whether it be a Jewish or a pagan way, and this turning to God in faith to receive new power from Him were symbolized, in early Christian practice, in the initiation ceremonies of 'baptism and the laying-on-of-hands'; and the outstanding characteristics of the new life that a Christian sought to live were the new sense of purpose and the increased sense of seriousness which were imparted to it by the certainty that, because Christ had been raised from the dead, there would be 'a resurrection of the dead' followed by a 'judgment' which would have eternal consequences.

These five ingredients our writer describes as 'the foundation' of the Christian life, but, if a superstructure is to be built upon this foundation pleasing to God, the Christian must always be seeking to grow in his understanding of them. Our author's primary aim therefore is to enable his readers to make such growth. He would have them see that 'repentance from dead works', if it is to be true and permanent in its effect, involves a continual laying hold of the truth (not merely as an intellectual proposition but as a vital principle), that the blood of Jesus, shed upon the cross, alone has the power of really 'cleansing man's conscience from dead works to serve the living God' (ix. 14).

Similarly 'baptism and the laying-on-of-hands' have no sacramental significance, but become just lifeless ordinances, mere 'dead works', if divorced from the gospel. For it is not water that cleanses the conscience but the redemption wrought by Jesus on the cross: nor can the 'laying-on-of-hands' bestow any supernatural gift apart from the release of the saving grace of Christ, which in virtue of His resurrection is available for all men; for 'he was crowned with glory and honour that he might be proved to have tasted death for every man' (ii. 9). The separation of the sacraments from the proclamation of the gospel must necessarily be a cause of stagnation in the Christian life.

Finally the 'resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment' may become just expressions of a formal creed powerless to stir to action. It is the constant recollection that Christ has been raised from the dead, with its corollary that sooner or later He will return again in divine judgment, which alone can make these doctrines sources of inspiration and power. A Christianity which has a weakened eschatology, which is not expecting the living God to act, and which loses its grasp of the truth that

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'the day is approaching', as our writer puts it in x. 25, in which God is going to act finally and decisively, is always a debilitated Christianity. Our author therefore is primarily concerned to emphasize that the 'first principles' of Christian truth contain implicitly what is necessary to salvation, but that they have to be continually translated, by a growing understanding on the part of the Christian of what they involve, from the realm of mere words into that of action and power. When he speaks in vi. 1 of 'laying aside' these elementary truths, he does not

mean abandoning them for something better; but, as the context implies, pressing on to a more mature grasp of their implications: and to help his readers in this task is what he says he purposes to do, 'if God permits' (vi. 3).

In Peter's speech after the baptism of Cornelius the primitive *kerugma* is described as 'the word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by Jesus Christ' (Acts x. 36). In verses 37 and 38 this 'word' is identified with 'Jesus of Nazareth whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil because God was with him... whom the Jews slew hanging him on a tree and whom God raised up the third day.' The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are thus said to constitute something which could be described both as the *word* of God and the *action* of God — the word ῆμα being used, like the Hebrew word *dabhar*, to designate both 'word' and 'event'. The essence of the primitive gospel therefore was that a final revelation of Himself by God had been made in the acts of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, by which peace between man and Himself had been effected. This in an elaborated form is the central theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The God who is described in xiii. 20 as 'the God of peace', the God who, as we saw in the last chapter, had in the previous history of Israel revealed in various and fragmentary ways His purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory', had finally spoken and acted, not through an *angel*, for angels, while they could be and often had been the messengers of God's purposes, 'ministering spirits' dispatched to prepare the way of salvation (i. 14), could never be the personal *embodiments* of the divine will, nor could they achieve victory over evil. Angels serve but they do not reign (i. 13). Nor had God uttered this final message through another *Moses*, for Moses, though he had played

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an all-important part in the establishment of God's 'household', being its moral educator and the mediator of the covenant which God had made with it, remained always a part of the dispensation in which he served, and subject to all the limitations which that involved. The final revelation had to be made and was made through one who 'had by inheritance a more excellent name than the angels' (i. 4) and who stood in such a close relationship to God, by whose will the household of Israel had been founded, that He had intimate knowledge of the founder's mind and will (iii. 4, 5). God therefore finally spoke through His *Son* (i. 2), who became in Jesus Son of man, and who, just because He was God's Son, who manifested His sonship as Son of man, was able to fulfil the divine purpose of 'bringing many sons to glory'. The particular element implicit in the story of Jesus as set forth in the primitive *kerugma*, which our author is most concerned to emphasize, is that in the living on earth of this unique life of sonship Jesus was able to manifest a perfect righteousness and a perfect obedience, in virtue of which He could offer a perfect sacrifice and so make possible that peace between sinful man and the all-holy God which was the only condition under which man could enter into fellowship with God.

It is one of our writer's more striking contributions to the interpretation of the primitive *kerugma* that he regards the divine destiny for man, set forth in Psalm viii, as finding its fulfilment *on the cross*. The Psalmist had asked the question, 'What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou carest for him?' and had drawn attention to the apparent nobility of man. Man seemed indeed, as the Psalmist contemplated him, to fall little short of God for, though made in the order of creation a little lower than the angels, he had

authority such as the angels did not have over other created things, and it was a sign of unique dignity and honour that he could display in this manner something of the authority of God Himself. Our writer accepts the words of this psalm as prophetic of the true destiny of man, but he finds them fulfilled in a most paradoxical manner. This ultimate subjection of all things to man was, he boldly asserts, made certain when Jesus tasted death for every man.³

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Through the suffering of His death Jesus performed the vital action which was necessary if men were ever to achieve the destiny marked out for them in this psalm. In virtue of this death He was 'crowned' at His resurrection 'with honour and glory', which made the effects of His suffering available for all men. It is important to notice that there is an emphasis in this passage (ii. 7, 8) upon the resurrection as well as on the death of Jesus, for to suppose that 'the glory and honour' with which Jesus is said in verse 9 to have been 'crowned' lay in the humiliation and glory of the death itself, as though the crown of thorns was the wreath of victory, is to introduce a Johannine thought which is not the natural interpretation of the passage. The so-called silence of the Epistle to the Hebrews about the resurrection, to which attention has sometimes been called, and which might lead us at first sight to dissociate it from the primitive *kerugma*, is only apparent. Apart from the specific reference to the resurrection in xiii. 20, as Westcott rightly said,⁴ 'The fact itself underlies all the writer's argument.' Crucifixion and resurrection were inseparably connected in the primitive preaching, as they are in our author's exposition of it. There is the same apparent omission of the resurrection and the sudden transition from the death of Christ to His exaltation in Philippians ii. 8, 9; a feature which has been held to support the thesis that that section is not the work of Paul but a pre-Pauline hymn. In both Hebrews and Philippians ii the resurrection is assumed.

But how could the death of Jesus have such unique significance and such far-reaching effects? The answer of this Epistle is that, though an event in time, it was eternal in character. It

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was the perfect offering of the perfect high priest who Himself had 'the power of an indestructible life' (vii. 16). Unlike all animal sacrifices, which had consisted of the slaughter of unconscious victims, the sacrifice of Jesus was voluntary and rational, and offered in the realm of eternal spirit. Moral in its nature and in its performance, it was also moral in its effect. It was able therefore to do something far greater than to remove the defilement of ritual uncleanness, which was the most the Levitical system of sacrifice could effect. It was able to cleanse men's consciences from dead works to serve the living God. (See ix. 14.) The uniqueness of this sacrifice lay in the fact that the victim which was offered was identical with

³ It is possible that in making the quotation from Psalm viii in ii. 7, 8 he deliberately preferred the version of the opening words found in Codex Alexandrinus alone of the Septuagint authorities, viz. 'Who is man?' to 'What is man?': the reading τίς for τὴν being found in the Chester Beatty Papyrus, the Copley Ephraemi, and the Bohairic Egyptian version. In this case the second half of the verse, instead of being a parallel question 'or the son of man that Thou carest for him?' might well be an answer to the original question: 'Who is the man that Thou art mindful of him?' 'Even the Son of man for Thou carest for Him'—the Son of man being He who is specifically identified in verse 9 with Jesus. Dr. Zuntz in his *Schweitzer Lectures on 'The Chester Beatty Papyrus of the Pauline Epistles has defended the originality of this reading. As, however, the MSS. authority for it is not decisive, and the variant may equally well have arisen through scribal error, we cannot feel certain about it. In any case the essential meaning of the passage is unaffected.*

⁴ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 230.

the priest who made the offering, and its perfection was due to the perfection of Him who was both priest and victim, a perfection reached through the discipline and obedience of His incarnate life (v. 9).

It is just because our writer concentrates upon the priestly offering by Christ of Himself upon the cross that he emphasizes almost exclusively those aspects of the story of Jesus which have a direct bearing upon it. In the summaries of the primitive *kerugma* special attention seems to have been drawn to the truth that Jesus was 'a man approved of God by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him' (Acts ii. 22) or, as it is stated in Acts x. 38, 'that he was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power and went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed with the devil, for God was with him.' Our writer is not concerned to show that Jesus was proved to be the Christ by the mighty deeds of His ministry; he assumes the Messiahship of Jesus. Nor is he concerned with the historical controversies and conflicts which led to the crucifixion; rather would he show the inevitability of the passion as the only possible manner in which the vocation of Jesus could be realized. The Christ who was Jesus had a specific mission to perform, for which He was sent into the world by God; to which He was called by God; and for which He had to prepare Himself by the experiences that came to Him in 'the days of his flesh', and above all by the obedience which He displayed in undergoing those experiences. As Du Bose has well said, 'Not how our Lord was Son of God but how He became Son of man is the subject of the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews.'⁵

The Jesus whom the Christians worshipped as Saviour could

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most characteristically be described as 'Apostle and High Priest': and it is to the aspects of His Person and His work implied in these titles that the writer especially draws the attention of his readers in iii. 1. Moses and the prophets had all been apostles of God, conscious of a heavenly calling and of a divine commission. Jesus too was God's 'Apostle'. He was not, however, just one to whom the word of God came, as was Abraham or Moses or Ezekiel. He was Himself sent from God. He belonged, as they did not, to the eternal world, being the Son of God. As such a Son He stood in an eternal relationship to the Father. The 'effulgence' of Godhead was radiant upon Him; the 'impress' of His Father's nature was stamped upon His nature. It was none other than *this* Son, through whom the world was made, whose destiny it was to carry the universe onwards to its appointed goal (i. 2, 3), who had been sent into the world and had become a son of man, a descendant of the race of Abraham, a member of the royal tribe of Judah (vii. 14). He had 'laid hold' not of angels, for they needed not His help, but of humanity in order to redeem humanity (ii. 16). This Apostle was sent to be the perfect High Priest. Indeed His high-priestly vocation was the essential feature of His Apostleship. He did not glorify Himself to become that High Priest (v. 5). A self-appointed priest is always a contradiction in terms (v. 4). He was appointed by God to the office (iii. 2). Exactly when this appointment was made, or exactly when the historic Jesus became fully conscious of it, cannot be stated. It may be that our writer associated the call of Jesus to priesthood with His baptism, for he follows the reference to the fact that 'the Christ did not glorify himself to be made a high priest' with the quotation from the second Psalm, 'Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee' (v. 5), which is the form of the words spoken by the voice from heaven in the western text of the Lucan account of Jesus' baptism (Lk. iii. 22). On the other hand, in the primitive preaching generally this quotation was applied, it would seem, especially to the

⁵ *High Priesthood and Sacrifice*, p. 47.

resurrection (Acts xiii. 33); and our author's other use of the quotation in i. 5 does not appear to refer to any particular occasion in the history of Jesus.

Before, however, the call to priesthood came to Jesus as a fully conscious experience, the very fact that He had become 'a sharer in flesh and blood' (ii. 4) was enabling Him to acquire a sympathy with human weakness which could be acquired only by human experience. Without sin He knew the pain and the

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limitations of human flesh. This is illustrated in rich detail in ii. 14-18. Without ceasing to be God's Son Jesus became man's brother; sharing the frustrations of man's creaturely estate; relying, as man has to rely, on God's help; facing, as man has to face them, the fear and the experience of death. Only by such personal experience of human trial could He become of assistance to sinful and fearful humanity. Only by being rendered like unto His brethren in all things could He become 'a merciful and faithful high priest' (ii. 17) and 'bear gently with the ignorant and erring' (v. 2). In v. 7-9 the deep reality of Jesus' human experience and in consequence His supreme power of compassion are given remarkable emphasis in the words: 'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a son he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.' It is usual for commentators to limit the references presupposed in this passage to the agony in Gethsemane recorded in the longer text of Luke and to the cry of dereliction from the cross recorded in Mark and Matthew; but the reference is probably a general one to the prayer-life of Jesus, an especial characteristic of which was that He paid attention to the answers to His prayers in such a way that He received continually fresh guidance and strength in the working out of His vocation. The word translated 'godly fear', εὐλάβεια found only in this Epistle in the New Testament, by its derivation means 'right apprehension', and the word therefore implies a right apprehension by Jesus throughout His ministry of God's dealings with Him. In Westcott's words, 'Christ learnt that every detail of His life and passion contributed to the accomplishment of the work which He came to fulfil and so He was "perfectly" heard.'⁶

It is clear from this great passage that the working out of our Lord's manhood was, as Nestorius insisted, a progress in obedience, obedience which is not something which can be learned all at once like the multiplication tables, but has to be learned at each separate stage in the school of experience, for experience is the one schoolmaster who never fails to teach something to his pupils. The play on the words 'learning' and 'experience'

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which the writer reproduces in v. 8, ἔμαθεν ἄφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν was a commonplace in Greek literature. He brings out, however, the unique characteristic of the manhood of Jesus which enabled Him to perform His unique sacrifice by stating that 'he learned *obedience* from what he suffered'. It was through this perfect obedience that 'he could be the cause of *eternal* salvation', and be truly designated by God 'a high priest after the order of Melchizedek' (v. 10). It was the obedience by which He was led to shed His blood on the cross which caused that blood to be the means of the ratification of the new covenant between God and man (ix.

⁶ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 129.

14-20): for the old covenant failed, just because its enactments were not obeyed by those with whom God had made it.

So strongly does our author underline this factor of obedience as the distinctive feature of Christ's mission to mankind and of His saving work, that he pictures in x. 5 Christ as coming into the world with the words of Psalm xl on His lips: 'Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired but a body hast thou prepared for me: in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God.' In so doing he anticipates what Jesus learned, as He grew in His understanding that the Old Testament scriptures were pointing to Himself, that the whole of His personality must be continually subject to God's will.⁷

This progress in obedience went on throughout the incarnate life of Jesus. In the opposition of His enemies, and particularly in the incidents of the passion, He 'endured the hostility of sinners against himself' (xii. 3); and the call to bear the ignominy of death by crucifixion (xii. 2) and to suffer on the cross as an outcast banished 'outside the camp' of Israel (xiii. 11) beyond 'the gates of the holy city' (xiii. 12) was the last and greatest call to obedience.

I have already drawn attention to the apparent absence of

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reference in this Epistle to the resurrection, and have insisted that this is no argument for disconnecting it either from the primitive *kerugma* or from the Pauline epistles. The argument from silence, even if the silence was absolute, which it is not, would in this instance be especially unwarranted. The reason for the absence of specific reference to the resurrection, except in xiii. 20, is the emphasis which the writer lays upon the presence of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary as the Lamb once slain upon the cross. His presentation of the high-priestly work of Jesus in terms of the Jewish ritual of the day of atonement causes him sometimes to give the impression that Jesus proceeded at once from Calvary to heaven, though his abode with the dead after His crucifixion is clearly implied in xiii. 20, where God is stated to have brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep. On the day of atonement, and on that day only, the high priest and the high priest alone entered through the veil into the holy of holies, where stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant containing a golden urn holding the manna and Aaron's rod and the tablets of the covenant, and the mercy seat crowned by the cherubim (ix. 4, 5). There he sprinkled sacrificial blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of himself and the people. This event, which was the annual climax of Jewish sacrificial religion, was, our writer insists, essentially imperfect. Its repetition year by year; the sinful character of the priest who made the offering; the material nature of the sacrifices offered (δικαιώματα σαρκός 'outward ordinances' he calls them in ix. 10) were all marks of its imperfection. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil which shut men off from the divine presence was broken down, the way was opened up into heaven itself, so that His death and the offering of His blood could not be dissociated in thought. As our author asserts in x. 20ff., Jesus opened up 'a new and living way through the

⁷ The Septuagint version of this saying, which our writer follows (as I have noted in *The Old Testament in the New Testament*, p. 106), adds to its value as an illustration of his argument. The Hebrew states, 'Mine ears hast Thou opened' instead of 'A body hast Thou prepared for Me,' the word 'opened' meaning 'pricked' and referring perhaps to the Jewish practice of piercing the ears of slaves, if after seven years' service they wished to become permanent slaves of their masters. This would have given our writer very good sense, but following his usual practice he quotes from the Septuagint.

veil'. His death, as it were, uncovered God so that man might have a vision of the glory that shone upon His face. The God who had hitherto been a distant God, because of the barrier of human sin, had now become very near. The difficult words 'that is his flesh' which follow the words 'through the veil' in x. 20 may be interpreted not in close connection with the veil, but as descriptive of the manner in which Jesus opened up a way through the veil. He did so by the offering of His humanity — that humanity which He had assumed, and whose inherent weaknesses (hence the use of the word 'flesh') He had

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experienced as He trod the way of obedience that led to the cross. If 'the flesh' is identified with 'the veil', then the thought may be that the breaking of Christ's flesh upon the cross was necessary for the breaking of the veil.

The uniqueness of this offering of Himself in death by Christ is underlined by our author in his insistence that it happened, and *could* only happen, and *need* only happen 'once'. Just as St. Paul asserts in Romans vi. 10 that Jesus died unto sin 'once for all ἐφάπαξ' so our writer thrice uses the same word to stress the final and complete character of His sacrifice (vii. 27, ix. 12, x. 10). Men can, of course, die only once, but the point of the repetition of the word ἐφάπαξ is to emphasize the truth that no one had ever before achieved by his death, or could ever again achieve by his death, what Jesus achieved by His life once offered. 'He appeared,' as our writer puts it in ix. 26, 'once at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' By this death He bequeathed a legacy to mankind such as no other human being by His death could ever bequeath, and this truth is further illustrated by the presentation by our author of Jesus as a 'testator' who has benefits to bestow upon mankind which cannot be received till after he himself has died. In the covenant-ritual there was no necessity for the death of either party contracting the covenant to occur before the terms of the covenant were valid; in order, therefore, to mark the contrast between the two covenants, our author, after describing Jesus as 'a mediator of a new covenant', proceeds almost imperceptibly to use the word διαθήκη which he has just used for 'covenant', in its ordinary sense of 'last will or testament' (ix. 16, 17). As the American Revised Standard Version translates these verses: 'Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive.' The writer then proceeds to describe the inauguration of the first covenant and to note that that also was accompanied by the shedding of blood.

In this chapter I have tried to suggest that the interpretation of the redeeming work of Jesus in terms of sacrifice in this Epistle is in effect an elucidation of what was implicit in the original Christian preaching. I have also suggested that our author was true to the story of Jesus as it was handed down by the early Christian preachers in identifying the covenant inaugurated by Christ with the new covenant of Jeremiah's

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prophecy, and in showing how in the inwardness and obedience of Christ's sacrifice there was present that element in sacrifice which prophets and psalmists had shown to be an essential element if sacrifice was to be fully acceptable to God. His theological treatment of the Old Testament is not in all these points essentially different from that of other New Testament writers.

His special contribution is that he sees in Melchizedek a type of a priesthood which transcends all other priesthood in its uniqueness and in the abiding results of its sacrifice. A more detailed consideration of the consequences of that sacrifice will form the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER III

THE CONSEQUENCES

The third constant theme in the primitive preaching was the certainty that as a result of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus a new age had come, in which a reformed Israel of God had been created, endowed with a fresh outpouring of the divine spirit, by whose operation supernatural signs and wonders and distinctive moral qualities were being manifested. The source of this new power was the reign of the exalted Christ in heaven whither He had passed after His resurrection. As Peter described the situation to the men of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost: 'Jesus being exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit hath poured out this which you hear and see' (Acts ii. 33). God had indeed 'exalted Jesus as Prince and Saviour' (Acts v. 31). St. Paul repeats the same conviction when he asserts that he will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ had wrought through him by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. xv. 19) and when he bears witness to the supernatural phenomena which were the result of the preaching of the word at Corinth (1 Cor. xii. 8-11) and also to the new charity which was to be found in the lives of those who had fully accepted the gospel. Similarly the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews testifies to the confirmation that was borne to the truth of the apostolic preaching 'by the signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit as he willed' (ii. 4) and by the fact that the Christians had been made sharers in the life of Christ (iii. 14), had tasted the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and the powers of the age to come (vi. 4, 5). Jewish thought tended to divide time into the present (evil) age and the (blessed) age to come. It is the conviction of our writer, as of the New Testament writers generally, that that blessed age had come, and that the Christians were receiving the benefits. If the reading of the *Textus Receptus* is followed in i. 1, ἐπ' ἐσχάτων for ἐπ' ἐσχάτου, 'in these last days' for 'at the end of these days', we should have additional evidence that our writer shared with the primitive preaching and with St. Paul the view that the age in which the Christians were

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living was the age of fulfilment, and so the last age of divine revelation. The Christians were those 'upon whom', as Paul puts it, 'the end of the ages had come' (1 Cor. x. 11).

This Epistle emphasizes, as do other documents in the New Testament, that this display of supernatural power, this supreme outpouring of the divine spirit was due to the exaltation of the ascended Christ. The resurrection of Jesus and His subsequent enthronement at the right hand of God were the divine assurance that salvation had been really effected by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He had entered once and for all into the eternal tabernacle, having secured for men eternal redemption (ix. 12). He had made atonement for the transgressions committed under the first covenant (ix. 15). It was now certain that He had

become the mediator of the new covenant between God and man, as the result of which there had been effected a remission of sins. Nothing further therefore needed to be done to make salvation sure. A real cleansing of the conscience from dead works had been made (ix. 14). The decisive blow had been struck at the empire of him who had power over death. 'Through death Jesus had destroyed him who had the power of death, that is the devil' (ii. 14); and those who were in thralldom to the devil's tyranny had been released. Jesus had 'delivered all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage' (ii. 15). The dying Jesus had been proved by His exaltation into heaven to be the Christus Victor. The last and fiercest strife between God and evil was over. The final battle had been won.

The salvation which Jesus is presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews as having accomplished on the cross, however, is not merely a negative salvation. As a result of it man is not only liberated from evil but endowed with new power from on high, as was clearly stated in the primitive preaching and in the teaching of St. Paul. The Saviour is also the Sanctifier. It is impossible in the light of the teaching of this Epistle ever to think of the atoning work of Christ on the cross apart from the sanctifying work in which, as the risen ascended glorified Lord, He is ever engaged. As Du Bose has well said, 'If Christ's righteousness is never our righteousness it can do us no good; if Christ's death is not actually our death too in Him we can know nothing of Christ's *life* as our own.' And he considered that one of the reasons why the modern world had largely abandoned faith in an objective salvation was that in some theological teaching the objective salvation in Christ had become divorced from a sub-

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jective salvation in ourselves.⁸ A careful study of this Epistle should save us from ever making such a divorce, for here the purpose of Christ's death is clearly shown to be not only the liberation of the believer from the guilt of sin but his consecration to a new and higher life, just as in the thought of the Pauline Epistles sanctification as well as justification is part of the whole process of salvation. As our author says in xiii. 12, 'Jesus suffered outside the gate *in order to sanctify* the people through his own blood,' and it is the exercise of this sanctifying power which constitutes, according to the teaching of this Epistle, Christ's reign in heaven.

In this heavenly sanctuary the great High Priest is pictured four times in the words of one of the author's favourite psalms as 'seated at the right hand of God' (Ps. cx. 1). Ordinary priests *stand* as they make their offerings in the earthly sanctuary. This High Priest *sits* as He exercises His ministry of sanctification in heaven. The language does not denote cessation from activity. Thus, to take just two examples, Jesus the Christ is pictured as seated in St. Matthew's Gospel when He promulgates the new law for the new Israel in the Sermon on the Mount, and when He teaches the people the truths of the kingdom of God in parables (Mt. v. 1, xiii. 1). Even in human affairs sitting is not always the posture of rest. As Swete wrote: 'Some of the hardest work of life is done by the monarch seated in his cabinet, and the statesman at his desk; and the seated Christ rests not day nor night from the unintermitting energies of heaven.'⁹ His very presence in heaven — because He is what He is, the perfect High Priest and the Lamb slain to take away the sin of the world — is in itself an activity. 'He has entered heaven,' says our author, in ix. 24, 'to appear on our behalf,' and the nature of His work is to make permanent intercession for us (vii. 25). 'Christ liveth,' as Calvin comments, 'for us, not for Himself.'

⁸ *High Priesthood and Sacrifice*, pp. 218, 219.

⁹ *The Ascended Christ*, p. 14.

But Christ's heavenly intercession is different from all other intercession. 'The New Testament,' in Swete's words, 'does not represent Him as an orante, *standing* ever before the Father with outstretched arms, like the figures in the mosaics of the catacombs, and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause in the presence of a reluctant God; but as a *throned* Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants

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His request. Our Lord's life in heaven is His prayer.'¹⁰ Or, as another scholar has recently expressed it: 'In reality the idea that Christ officiates before the throne of God by any sort of liturgical action or by any active pleading of His passion is nowhere to be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews.... We are simply told that He has gone into heaven itself to appear before God on our behalf, ... and that He is able to save in perpetuity all who come through Him to God, always living to intercede for them.'¹¹

If we ask how it is that this presence of Christ in heaven can have for ever this saving power, which can be effective in all those who draw nigh to God through Him and are the subjects of Christ's intercessory prayer, the answer is that He has carried with Him into the heavenly sphere the whole power that was released in the shedding of His blood upon the cross. The shed blood of Jesus can therefore be described as still 'speaking'; and, as our author asserts in xii. 24, 'speaking more powerfully than the blood of Abel'; for Abel's blood called only for vengeance, while Christ's blood speaks a message of salvation for sinners. And not only can the blood of Jesus be thought of as ever 'speaking': it can also be described as being 'ever sprinkled'. The high priest on the day of atonement sprinkled the mercy seat in the holy of holies with the sacrificial blood and not until this action had been performed was atonement effected. Christ after His resurrection entered into the heavenly sanctuary, which was the true and abiding counterpart of the earthly and temporary sanctuary. At this point, however, the comparison with the old ritual breaks down. For the heavenly sanctuary needed not to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus in the sense in which the earthly sanctuary needed to be cleansed. It is noticeable that in ix. 23 the writer speaks of the necessity for 'the heavenly things', τὰ ἐπουράνια to be cleansed with better sacrifices. It may be, as Westcott seems to suggest, that this vaguer term (found also in the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians) was deliberately chosen to signify not so much heaven itself, as the spiritual sphere in which atonement becomes a reality to the believer. The danger was thus avoided of transferring to another world the local conditions which belong solely to the earthly tabernacle. The thought seems to be that

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by entering heaven the crucified Saviour transfers from an earthly localized realm into a spiritual universal sphere the benefits of His passion. Therefore His blood can be thought of as sprinkled in the hearts and consciences of all believers, who are in consequence able to draw nigh, and who do draw nigh unto God through Him. By His death and exaltation into heaven the cleansing effects of the blood poured out in sacrifice are thus made available. This is the supreme consequence of the story of Jesus as set forth in primitive Christianity.

St. Paul had asserted in 1 Cor. xv. 45 that Christ in virtue of His resurrection had become 'a life-giving spirit', able, that is to say, to impart to others His own supernatural life. In 2 Cor.

¹⁰ *The Ascended Christ*, p. 95.

¹¹ *Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, W. Leonard, p. 73.

iii. 17 he drew attention to the wider scope made possible since the resurrection for the gracious saving activity of Christ in the words, 'The Lord is spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.' The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews may perhaps be drawing attention to this truth in his apparent identification in x. 20 of 'the veil' through which Jesus opened up a new and living way into the holy of holies with 'his flesh'. As we have seen, the exegesis of this passage is very difficult, and two possible interpretations have already been mentioned. A third possible explanation might be that Jesus in death passed through the flesh with all the limitations and restrictions that the flesh necessarily involves, so that in the power of His risen life He might exercise in the realm of spirit a sanctifying power over all believers, whoever and wherever they might be. His blood therefore 'speaks' in the sense that it proclaims the truth that, because He is a High Priest for ever, a new life is possible for men on earth through Him. His blood is 'sprinkled' in the cleansing power which all who become partakers of Christ can experience (x. 22). As Calvin somewhat quaintly put it: 'the blood of Christ is always in a manner distilling before the presence of the Father, in order to irrigate heaven and earth.'¹² In other words all that the sacrifice of His life in the death on the cross obtained for us men and for our salvation, all 'the benefits of his passion', the heavenly High Priest bestows upon believers.

But He bestows these benefits upon believers, not just as *isolated* believers, but as members of a society. It was an essential element in the primitive *kerugma* that a definite con-

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sequence of the story of Jesus was the creation of a new Israel. 'The stone which the builders rejected,' Jesus the Messiah, whom most of the Jews had refused, had in fulfilment of the prophecy of Psalm xviii become 'the head corner-stone' of a new, or rather a transformed, house of God, inhabited by a new household of God's people. This new Israel of, the Christian Church was continuous with the ecclesia of the Old Testament. Indeed those who belonged to it, whether Jews or Gentiles, exhibited the same quality of faith as did the patriarchs whose faith is illustrated in chapter xi. It is because the Christians are members of this household of God, which has existed since the days of Abraham, that they can entertain the promise of entering into 'the rest' which it was God's purpose that mankind should enjoy, but which the Israelites in the days of Joshua were prevented from enjoying because of unbelief when they entered the promised land of Canaan (iv. 9).

This Christian community can also be described as Christ's 'family'. This was implicit in Jesus' own words during His earthly life when 'he looked around on those who were sitting about him and said: "Behold my mother and my brothers"' (Mk. iii. 34). The Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes the same truth when it speaks of Christ as the firstborn of a family of 'brothers' whom He has gathered round Him as an ecclesia. 'He was not ashamed,' we read in ii. 12, 'to call them "brethren",' saying (in the words of Ps. xii. 22) that He would declare God's name to His brethren; and praise Him in the midst of the ecclesia. Isaiah and his children stood out in their day as part of the faithful remnant of God's people (Is. viii. 18). Jesus and the faithful who believe on Him constitute the counterpart of that faithful remnant of the old Israel of God, and form the nucleus of the new. So in ii. 13 Jesus is pictured as relating to Himself the words of Isaiah and saying, 'Behold I and the children whom God has given me.'

¹² *Commentary*, p. 238.

It is significant in this connection that the author always addresses his readers as a community — whether large or small we know not — speaking of them in iii. 1 as ‘dedicated brethren’, ἄγιοι ἄδελφοί, and describing them in that same verse as ‘sharers together in a heavenly calling’, who acknowledge with himself a common confession. They are ‘brethren’ not just because they are invisibly held together by the inward allegiance of each to Jesus as the Son of God who had become their Brother, but because they are members of a visible com-

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munity, the same divine ‘household’ in which Moses had once ministered faithfully as a servant, and over which Christ now reigns as God’s Son (iii. 6). The first person plural is used in this Epistle sometimes to denote the ‘we’ of authorship and sometimes to designate ‘we Christians’.

Our author also envisages the Christian Church under the imagery of a ‘city’. The children of the new covenant are members of a πόλις, as was suggested in the rendering found in some MSS. of the Septuagint version of the prophecy of Jeremiah relating to the new covenant, in which the words of Je. xxxi. 34 are found in the form, ‘they shall not teach every man his fellow citizen (πολίτην)’ instead of ‘they shall not teach every man his brother (ἀδελφόν)’; and it is the reading πολίτην which our author quotes in viii. 11. The imagery of a city suggested in the ancient world permanence and stability in contrast to the vagrant unsettled life of the desert. Abraham, realizing the transitoriness of his existence, and trusting in the promises of God that something more durable and permanent would be the lot of himself and his descendants, could be said therefore to be ‘looking for a city which had foundations whose fashioner and architect was God’ (xi. 10): and all the patriarchs, because they realized that they were essentially strangers on earth, were seeking a πατρίς (xi. 14), a word which, as we can see from its reference in the Gospels to Nazareth (Mk. vi. 1), could designate a ‘city’. The Christians under the new covenant, mediated by the work of Christ the perfect priest, through which they have obtained direct access to the throne of grace, have been brought to such a city, which could mystically be described as ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ (xii. 22). But the visible Church on earth, even though it is the new Israel, and even though it can be thought of under the category of ‘city’, can never be equated with the heavenly Jerusalem. The Church on earth is and must always be a pilgrim Church, a city so to speak in a wilderness; and the final entry into the divine rest, which is promised to its members, still remains an eschatological hope. But believers, so long as they offer service well-pleasing to God, receive ‘a kingdom which cannot be shaken’ (xii. 28).

That the believers must offer such service is inherent in the very covenant relationship into which they have been brought through the mediation of Christ, the ‘high priest of their confession’, and in virtue of which they are the people of God. By the old covenant, mediated by Moses at Sinai, Israel was con-

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secrated to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Ex. xix. 6) and had laid upon it the obligation of offering continually sacrificial worship to God, in obedience to the precepts of the Levitical law, in a worldly sanctuary (ἄγιον κοσμητόν). Under the new covenant a new people of God has been created, cleansed from sin by the one sacrifice of Christ once offered, and called upon to be obedient not to any external code of law but to the divine law inwardly communicated to all believers (viii. 10). As members of this new Israel the believers must

make the response of obedience which the new covenant demands from them. For the new covenant, like the old, imposes conditions. Salvation is not solely an external remission of sins, but the imparting by the spirit of God in the heart of the believer of a truer insight into the nature of the response which God expects from the redeemed. Freedom of access to God, that drawing nigh to Him without any external material sacrifice which results in a life of friendship and fellowship with God, has now been made possible through Christ, but does not mean that the believer is altogether exempt from offering sacrifice himself. The sacrifice that is expected of him is of a different kind, however, from that offered in Judaism. It is the sacrifice, which Paul calls in Rom. xii. 1 'a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is spiritual worship', and it consists in the offering of the $\sigma\upsilon\mu\alpha$, the entire personality. In order to be well-pleasing to God the believer must, in the teaching of our Epistle, offer up continually to God what the writer of Psalm 1 declares to be more acceptable to God than any animal sacrifice, 'the sacrifice of praise', the 'calves of the lips', as the Hebrew of Hosea xiv. 2 described it; or, as the Septuagint quoted by our author translated it, 'the fruit of our lips' (Heb. xiii. 15). Nor must he forget the practice of benevolence and liberality (xiii. 16).

Apart from this emphasis on the inwardness and ethical character of spiritual worship, it is natural to ask what light the Epistle throws upon the outward observances of Christian worship. As we have already noticed, baptism and the laying-on-of-hands as rites of initiation are specifically mentioned in chapter six as among the rudiments of Christianity in which every believer has received instruction. They form part of the foundation of the Christian life which must never be forgotten, but on which a superstructure must continually be built. Why the writer uses the word baptism in the plural in this passage is uncertain. We can only conjecture that possi-

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bly some of the readers had been baptized by John's disciples and had subsequently been rebaptized in the name of Christ. More specific teaching about the significance of baptism appears to be given in x. 22, where 'the cleansing of the heart from an evil conscience' is correlated with 'the washing of the body with pure water', though this last expression has also been interpreted, in the light of Ezk. xxxvi. 25 ('I will sprinkle clean water upon you') in a more general sense of sanctification which the believer is continually receiving through the activity of the Holy Spirit. To interpret the expression 'being enlightened' (vi. 4) as a synonym for 'being baptized' would be to read back into the Epistle a later concept. 'Enlightenment' here means being instructed in divine revelation.

Whether there is a specific reference to the sacrament of bread and wine in this Epistle has been much debated and must be considered doubtful. Roman Catholic expositors have sometimes seen in the offering by Melchizedek of bread and wine to Abraham a foreshadowing of the offering of bread and wine in the Eucharist. It is, however, noticeable that our author says not a word about the bread and wine which constituted Melchizedek's gift of refreshment to the weary warrior after his return from battle. But, when he is urging his readers not to be 'led away by diverse teaching, for it is well that the heart should be strengthened by grace, not by foods' he adds in xiii. 10, 'We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.' What does this reference to an 'altar' signify? It has been identified with the cross, with Christ Himself, and with the altar of the Christian Eucharist. It would seem that primarily the reference is to both Christ and His cross, the altar not being considered apart from the victim who was offered upon it. The Latin side of Codex Claromontanus substitutes 'hostiam' for 'altare'. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the

ultimate source of the entire spiritual sustenance of the Christians; and that fact was kept before the minds of the Christians every time they showed forth sacramentally the death of the Lord Jesus. From the cross and from nowhere else the benefits of salvation came. The grace of Calvary was the food of the Christians. For the Christian, then, the entire system of animal sacrifice was at an end. To retain, therefore, or to desire to retain any ceremonies comparable to the sacrifices of the Levitical system, or to seek in any way to retain the distinctions between clean and unclean food, was an utter impossibility.

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This is the point the writer seems anxious to make in this passage and he illustrates it by reference to the instructions about the sin-offering in Lv. xvi. 27, where it is laid down that the sacrificial victim, after the blood has been offered, should be burnt *in toto* outside the camp. Those who 'served the tabernacle' in this case could not eat of any part of the sacrificial victim. What was true in pre-Christian days in 'the case of this isolated sacrifice is now true of the sacrifice which is the consummation of all sacrifice. Jesus suffered 'outside the gate' of Jerusalem where the animal of the sin-offering was consumed. The benefits of His sacrifice are all-sufficient. Therefore those Jewish Christians who might still be eager to serve the tabernacle could not at the same time eat of the Christian 'altar'; in other words they could not secure the benefits of Christ's passion.

The fact that Christ suffered 'outside the gate' (xiii. 12), outside the city wall of Jerusalem, is in our author's view a permanent reminder that, because the new covenant has been established, the old has been fulfilled, and that as a system of worship the Levitical law of sacrifice is obsolete for the Christian. Jeremiah, he says earlier in the Epistle, by the very use of the expression 'new covenant' has antiquated the first. 'And whatever is antiquated and aged is on the verge of vanishing' (viii. 13). Through Christ crucified, risen, and ascended a 'spiritual' worship has been rendered possible in every way superior to the 'material' worship of the earthly tabernacle. The Christian can now approach *boldly* (παρρησία) the throne of grace, relying on Christ the mediator, and obtain mercy and find grace to help him in time of need (iv. 16). He has *boldness* to enter into the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus (x. 19).

What a contrast is here revealed between the timidity, the barriers, the restrictions, the wearisome repetition, the sense of imperfection which characterized the worship of the Jewish sanctuary, and the free, fearless, unimpeded confident access to God now made available for men in Christ. The law indeed preceded the gospel and was a necessary preparation for it, but how vastly superior is the kingdom of the crucified and ascended Christ to the dispensation of Moses.

This superiority is elaborated still further in the magnificent word picture in xii. 18-25. The very physical circumstances described in Ex. xix and xx, under which the law was revealed to Moses, when reconsidered in the light of the more glorious revelation that has now been made, are seen, the writer suggests,

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to bear evidence of its imperfection. How earthly, how sensuous. how merely visible, how fearful everything in that distant scene now appeared to be! Everywhere the tangible and threatening! A mountain that could be touched (even if touching it was forbidden) and that could be burned with fire; darkness, thunder and lightning, noise and terror and danger on

every side as God was manifested in all the fearfulness of His justice and of His holiness. If even by chance an innocent beast should touch the mountain it was to be stoned to death. So terrible indeed did the penalties that awaited any infringement of the divine precepts appear to be that the people entreated that no further message be spoken to them, and according to our author Moses gave expression on behalf of the people to this fearfulness in the words which he also used on another occasion: 'I am overcome with fear and trembling.'

On the other hand the scene of the Christian's approach to God is very different. The Christians, the children of the new covenant, approach God together in a fellowship which unites the unseen and the spiritual with the visible and the earthly. Their abode, their spiritual home, is Mount Zion, not the Mount Zion on which the earthly city of Jerusalem was built but Mount Zion which is equated with the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, a spiritual city which is inhabited by myriads of angels in festal array, for they are rejoicing in the blessings that are being bestowed on redeemed humanity. It is also inhabited by all who have been called by God to share in the spiritual blessings which He has purposed for those who love and obey Him and who enjoy the privileges which in Jewish thought the first-born alone enjoy, 'the church of the first-born whose names are registered in heaven,' and by all the faithful down the ages from the patriarchs onwards who have loyally played their part in the working out of God's plan for salvation, the spirits of righteous men whose work has now reached its perfection in the finished work of Christ for men's salvation. Here the faithful serve God in reverence and godly fear, ever conscious that God is the judge of all men but safe in the only security that is permanent, the security of the new covenant, mediated by Jesus, by whose redeeming blood they have been cleansed and sanctified. Although there is no permanent abode here for the Christian, yet to be in such a company as this is already to have a foretaste of that divine rest, the promise of which remains to the people of God, and to experience some-

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thing of the realization of the purposes of Him who wills to 'bring many sons to glory'.

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CHAPTER IV

THE APPEAL

The fourth constant element in the primitive preaching, within whose framework I have suggested that the teaching of the Epistle to The Hebrews for all its special characteristics should be set, was an appeal to those who heard it to turn to the Lord God in repentance in view of the final revelation of Himself which He had made in Jesus the Christ, and of the consequences which had resulted in particular from His death and resurrection. It was an appeal to join the fellowship of the redeemed; to live according to the law of Christ, and to await in confidence the final climax of the long drama of revelation which might take place very soon when the Lord Jesus returned as a prelude to the final judgment.

As the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to converted men and women who were in serious danger of falling away from grace and abandoning Christianity altogether, it is very natural that the element of exhortation and appeal should play a large part in it, and that the writer

should describe it as λόγος παρακλήσεως. So great indeed is the danger confronting the readers and so critical their situation that the writer throughout the letter alternates doctrinal instruction and earnest exhortation to an extent unique in the New Testament books. Thereby he shows more clearly perhaps than any other writer that the appeal to live a Christian life must always be based on Christian doctrine, and that if Christian ethical standards are being abandoned it must always be because Christian faith is weak. This was certainly true in the case of the Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was sent. They had repented some years before from the dead works of a legalistic Judaism and turned in faith to God as revealed in Jesus; they had been initiated into the fellowship of the redeemed by baptism and the laying-on-of-hands; they had enjoyed the first joyous rapture of conversion, tasting the heavenly gift and experiencing the Holy Spirit; and they had in consequence been brought into definite contact with the eternal world. They were Christians of long standing who ought by then to have been in a position to teach others and to enable others to partake of the spiritual privileges which they themselves had enjoyed, but they were

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still in need of elementary instruction themselves (v. 1 2). Here lay the pathos and the seriousness of their situation.

Although we cannot discover any very exact information about the circumstances of the Christians to whom this letter was originally sent, for the date and destination of the Epistle are alike uncertain, it contains many allusions, direct and indirect, to their spiritual condition. They held still (to quote the language of 2 Tim. iii. 5) to 'a form of godliness', but 'denied its power'. Jesus was no longer to them the last and final revelation of God's purposes for mankind, the Reconciler and Sanctifier through whom they were drawing nigh to God with glad hearts in the company of their fellow Christians. On the contrary, some of them were abandoning 'the gathering of themselves together' (x. 25) and were failing to fulfil the ethical obligations of their faith. Brotherly love and hospitality to strangers were no longer practised as they had once been. Sympathy was disappearing. Moral standards had declined. Covetousness, born of lack of trust in a God who was faithful, and resulting in discontent, was poisoning the springs of moral action. The same phenomena have been found again and again in periods when faith has become dim and they are familiar to ourselves today. The ethical injunctions given in the first six verses of chapter xiii are not just the formal repetition of conventional ethical instructions, a moral code which Christian teachers were wont to give, but seem to be directly related to the particular circumstances of the readers. The injunction 'Let brotherly love abide' suggests that it was in danger of disappearing. The reminder '*Forget* not hospitality' implies that that is what the readers were doing. A paralysing stagnation had set in with its inevitable accompaniments of hopelessness and despair. The Jesus whom they had originally confessed had become part of a dead tradition and was no longer thought of as a living and abiding High Priest, 'the same yesterday, today and for ever,' who was in a real sense contemporary with themselves, and who had done everything that was necessary to enable man to have fellowship with God.

Another important factor in the religious situation of the first readers of this Epistle was the fearfulness with which they were anticipating persecution, which might bring with it the possibility of martyrdom. This fear of suffering was tempting them to apostasy. They had *not yet* resisted unto blood (xii. 4), but the implication is that they might soon be called upon to do so,

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and the writer seems more than doubtful whether their faith will be strong enough to enable them to resist if necessary unto death, 'striving against sin', i.e. the sin of apostasy. They have forgotten the place which suffering must inevitably play in the training of all who are called to the glory of divine sonship (xii. 5, 6).

The essential reason for this moral and spiritual torpor, which had sapped their vitality and was tempting them to abandon Christ altogether rather than face the suffering which persecution would bring, was not the sudden yielding to a new temptation but a failure to grow in understanding of the gospel which they had once eagerly embraced. Not to grow is to stagnate. The earth must drink the rain that often falls upon it and bring forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated; otherwise it is worthless and nigh to being cursed (vi. 7,

8). What the earth does unconsciously the Christian must do consciously. He must seek perpetually by the light of the divine Spirit to keep the word of the gospel once received a living word; for if he allows it to be choked by formalism he too will receive not a blessing but a curse.

It is in the light of the author's endeavour to bring home to his readers the gravity of their situation that those specially severe passages of the Epistle, which have sometimes been misinterpreted and often seemed offensive to Christians, must be considered. In the first of these passages (vi. 4-6, R.V.) the writer states that 'as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.' The key to the interpretation of this passage lies in the words 'and then fell away', *παραπεσόντας*, for there are two kinds of 'falling away', particular and general. There are the temporary lapses *from* grace due to the committal of separate sins and there is the complete falling *beyond* the grace of God. It was the error of the Montanists and the Novatians that they interpreted this passage in the light of the former meaning of 'falling away', and denied the possibility of repentance for sins committed after baptism. The true meaning is given by Calvin, who comments, 'He falls away who forsakes the word of God, who extinguishes its light, who deprives himself of the taste of the

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heavenly gift, who relinquishes a participation of the Spirit.' 'Falling away' in this passage must be equated then with the 'sin against the Holy Spirit' referred to in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk. iii. 29) and the 'sin unto death' mentioned in the First Epistle of St. John (v. 16), and it must be interpreted as apostasy. The American Revised Standard Version, legitimately I think, renders the word translated in the Revised Version 'and then fell away' by the words 'if they then commit apostasy'. The word *παραπίπτω*, not found elsewhere in the New Testament (though the noun *ἁμαρτάνω* is found), is a much stronger word than *ἀνοστάνω*. It designates a deliberate turning away from a particular path. Both the verb and the noun are used together in Ezk. xiv. 13 and xv. 8 of committing a trespass so grave that it brings desolation in its train.

The writer does not imply that his readers have already apostatized or must inevitably do so, but he is warning them of the consequences should they be guilty of this supreme sin, to

which they may be tempted as the result of a long period of gradual backsliding and spiritual torpor. And for men, who have once died with Christ for the sole purpose of living a new life in Him, to renounce Him and return to a state of death is virtually to acknowledge that Christ deserved to be crucified as an impostor. The word ἀνασταυρόω in this passage seems to be used not in the sense of 'crucifying *again*', for Christ cannot be crucified again, but in the classical sense of the word 'to raise *up* on the cross' with a view to exposing the shame of the criminal. The word should then be taken conjunctively with the word παραδειγματίζω which follows it. The apostate exposes the crucified Jesus to open shame by his actions. He is as it were assisting in the work of those who originally put Jesus to death. This meaning is well brought out in the American Revised Standard Version, 'they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt.'

Similar thoughts underlie the second of these severe passages which are such a notable feature of this Epistle, x. 26, 27 translated in the R.V., 'For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries.' Here a solemn warning is given of the possibility of persisting in a sin so grievous as to result in complete alienation from

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Christ and the total extinguishing of the light of divine revelation which has shone in the believer's heart. This means that the sacrifice of Christ has been completely rejected; and, as there is no sacrifice which can effect what that sacrifice effected, if that sacrifice does not abide as a permanent influence in the believer, he is still in his sins and there can remain only a 'fearful expectation', which cannot be exactly defined (hence the writer qualifies it by the word 'a certain') but which consists of the torment of an evil conscience, and will lead eventually to his destruction as by fire as an enemy of Christ. A complete denial of the validity and the authority of the divine ordinances by the committal of the abominable sin of the worship of foreign deities, as distinct from the failure to observe individual precepts, led, under the terms of the old covenant, on the evidence of two or three witnesses, to death by stoning (Dt. xvii. 2-7). If such was the situation under the old covenant, how much more severe, our writer argues (x. 28, 29), must the punishment necessarily be for those who reject contemptuously the Son in whom God has finally spoken to man; who account as something 'common' the very means by which God had chosen to make men 'holy', namely the sanctifying blood by which the new covenant was inaugurated; and who outrage the spirit of grace by denying that any spiritual power has resulted from the death and resurrection of Jesus. God had revealed Himself, in words quoted in x. 30, as 'a God to whom vengeance belonged' (Dt. xxxii. 25), and He who was ready to avenge His people against their adversaries (Dt. xxxii. 26) will also avenge the wrong done to Himself. The privilege of belonging to God's people does not carry with it exemption from judgment. On the contrary, the special objects of God's care are the special objects of His judgment. In the words of 1 Pet. iv. 17, 'judgment begins with the house of God.' He has said that He will judge His people, and because He is 'a living God' His words must ultimately be fulfilled. To fall into the hands of such a living God is 'a fearful thing' (x. 31). 'A mortal man,' Calvin commented, 'however incensed he may be, cannot carry his vengeance beyond death: but God's power is not bounded by so narrow limits: besides we often escape from men, but we cannot escape from God's judgment.'

Yet a third warning, given in the same solemn strain with an equally strong emphasis on the transcendence of God, is found in xii. 15, 16. Here the writer warns the readers of the

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grievous danger into which without constant vigilance it is so easy to fall, the danger not so much of 'falling *short* of the grace of God', as our Revised Version renders verse 15. but of 'falling *away from* the grace of God'. The word ὕστερέω here used implies, I suggest, being in the state in which they lack grace altogether; the danger of calling the light that has shone within them darkness. They desire to live at peace with all men, the writer suggests in xii. 14; but this desire may well lead them to compromise with evil, to appease their persecutors, and to to avoid martyrdom by apostasy. He therefore significantly inserts after the words 'Follow after peace with all men' an additional object 'and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord.' The deliberate worshipper of strange gods was designated under the old law 'a root that bore gall and bitterness' (Dt. xxix. 18). The original text of the Septuagint in this passage was probably μή τις ἐν ὑμῶν ρίζα ἄνω φύουσα . . . ἐν χολῇ καὶ μικρία. Our writer read ἐντολῇ for ἐν χολῇ following an early corruption of the text retained in some MSS. of the Septuagint, and this gives him the sense that the presence of a single 'fornicator', used here in the Biblical sense of idolator, or 'profane person', may cause great trouble among the community and be the source of pollution to many. It is well then that the readers should bear in mind the story of Esau, who stands out in Scripture as a typically 'profane' person who regarded material prosperity as the highest good, and who so despised holy things that he preferred the temporary gratification of his flesh to the privileged position of being a first-begotten son. For a single meal he sold his birthright with irreparable consequences. Though he afterwards grieved, he could never regain the prerogative of the firstborn. No place could he find for repentance though there was room enough for the sorrow of remorse. Tears he had in abundance, but they were not shed because he had offended God; they were merely tears of self-pity.

These Hebrew Christians were indeed in a perilous position, but they had not yet totally succumbed to the dangers which the writer so powerfully describes in these passages, and his main object in writing is to enable them to make their salvation more secure.

First he would have them remember even in their terrible predicament that they have the sympathy of the great High Priest, for He was 'tempted in all points as we are'; He was

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tempted even to avoid the implications of His high vocation as 'the apostle and high priest of our confession' and to avoid the agony of the cross by praying to Him who was able to save Him from death;¹³ and that this Priest 'ever lives to intercede for them' (v. 7).

Secondly he bids them recall to mind their former days (x. 32ff.) and to realize from what heights they had fallen. It was their shame that they had begun well and had then slipped back after having made good progress. The memory of their early struggle, however, and the recollection in particular of those who had originally preached the gospel to them, and who had apparently crowned their lives of witness to the gospel by the witness of martyrdom (xiii. 7), ought to stimulate them to finish their course with renewed faith and patience. In those great days, which might now seem so far away, they had been publicly exposed to reproaches

¹³ See Mt. xvi. 22, 23; xxvi. 39.

and to afflictions; and had been the companions of others who had been similarly treated (or, as the words might mean, had shared the reproaches of those who were so treated). Their sympathy had been extended to the prisoners (τοῖς δεσμίοις and not τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου being the true reading in x. 34).¹⁴ Yet they had found in such deprivations a cause for joy, a joy not due to the loss inflicted upon them but to the renewing of the conviction, which such loss had brought them, that they had better and more enduring possessions, ‘in heaven’, as the later MSS. add in verse 34 in explanation. This consciousness that, though on earth, they were in a real sense in touch with heaven itself, this boldness to approach directly to the throne of grace because of what their great high priest had done for them, this certainty that God will reward all who serve Him, if only they seek to serve Him without any thought of reward and solely in the strength of the grace which He gives them — this is what these Hebrew Christians have lost and this is why the writer implores them, ‘Cast not away your boldness, which has a great recompense of reward’ (x. 35).

Part of their essential need is the recovery of the ‘patience’

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which they had displayed in the earlier days of their Christian life. But patience is closely allied to the virtue of hope and by no means least in Biblical thought. Men give up the struggle when they have abandoned hope. So large a part does the element of hope play in the Christian religion that our writer describes the Christian confession in x. 23 as a ‘confession of hope’. To acknowledge and to experience once ‘again this hope must therefore be an essential condition of the spiritual recovery of the readers of this Epistle, and it is no wonder that the note of hope sounds so loudly and so often in its pages. It is possible to maintain membership in God’s household, it is implied in iii. 6, only if we hold firm our confidence and the hope which is our pride, τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος, and the writer desires each one of his readers to show the same eager, continual, looking forward to the realization of their hope, as they had shown in past days when they rendered loving service to the saints. In this way alone can they become imitators of those whose faith and patience enable them to inherit the promises God made to them (vi. 9-11). It was to encourage us to ‘lay hold of the hope set before us’ that God ratified His original promise to Abraham with an oath. Such hope is the Christian’s anchor, mooring him to that inner sanctuary whither Jesus the high-priestly forerunner has already gone (vi. 18, 19). Because such a High Priest is reigning in the heavenly sphere, we can draw nigh to God with a better hope that one day we shall reign with Him in glory (vii. 19). If the readers are to endure patiently the afflictions, which are the inevitable lot of those who are called to be the sons of God (xii. 7), if they are to run with patience the race that is set before them (xii. 1), and are finally, after having done the will of God on earth, to receive the promises, they must hold the confession of their hope immovable (x. 23), knowing that He who gave the promises will fulfil them.

It is with this reference to the special needs of the readers in our minds that we should consider the definition of faith and the chronicle of the heroes of faith in the eleventh chapter. Here the writer is in effect illustrating the thesis set forth by Paul in Rom. viii. 20 that ‘by hope we are saved’, for the apostle, who was the great exponent of the doctrine of justification by faith, was also the preacher of salvation by hope. Faith is indeed the primary Christian

¹⁴ The Chester Beatty papyrus has here a peculiar reading τοῖς δεσμοῖς without μου a reading which might appear at first sight favourable to the reading τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου and therefore to add some support to the Pauline authorship. But, as Kenyon remarks, ‘the omission of μου renders this very doubtful, and suggests the possibility if not the probability that the δεσμοῖς of the papyrus is a simple scribal error for δεσμίοις.’

virtue; but it is so, to our writer, not merely because it enables the believer to make real in himself the right-

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eousness freely offered to him in the grace of the Lord Jesus, a sense which the word has so conspicuously in the Pauline letters and with which there is no reason whatever for thinking that our writer would not be in entire agreement, but also because it sustains and gives substance to hope and demonstrates the reality of the invisible. It is ἐλπίζομένων ὑποστάσις ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων (xi. 1). Throughout the eleventh chapter, in the long list of heroes, whose lives and actions have testified to the reality of their faith, the writer makes it clear that the two characteristics which shine out in the records of these men and women are their vision of the unseen and their power of persevering in a long pilgrim's progress towards the final realization of their hopes. They endured like Moses as 'seeing him who is invisible'. They saw and greeted the promises afar off and died not having seen their fulfilment but very sure that fulfilment would come. They moved steadily and patiently forward towards the goal which God had in mind for the many sons whom He purposed to bring to glory. Each played his or her part in the gradual unfolding of God's plan for man's salvation, certain that that plan would be realized. Every conceivable form of suffering had been experienced by them, as the writer is at pains to remind his readers in the closing verses of the chapter, in his desire to brace them for the last and decisive test of their own faith which may soon come to them. With such a wonderful record of triumphant suffering as their inspiration he would have them rekindle their own faith so as not to abandon their salvation. Though Jesus came as the climax of a long period of preparation He could truly be called the 'originator' (ἀρχηγός) of the Christian's faith, and because the promises, which God had been continually holding out before man's eyes since the days of Abraham, had been fulfilled in Jesus who 'being himself brought to perfection had become for all those that obey him the cause of eternal salvation' (v. 9), He could also be truly described as the 'Finisher' or 'Perfecter (τελειωτής) of the Christian's faith. He who was the 'Originator' of their salvation (ii. 10) was so because He was also the Cause (αἴτιος) of their salvation (v. 9).

It is to this Originator and Perfecter of faith that Christians must be ever looking as they play their part in the long relay race (for this is the manner in which a Christian should regard human life), watched by a large company of former competitors, towards the final rest that awaits the faithful, the 'sabbath rest'

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of the people of God. The readers of this Epistle, if they are not to give up this race altogether, must lay aside every weight, which might lead to the particular sin which was already insidiously encircling them in its folds τὴν εὐπερίστατον ἁμαρτίαν, the epithet conveying the idea of a close-fitting garment like an athlete's wrap and also of the specious attractiveness of sin. This sin was the sin of apostasy. Fearful as they are of the suffering which seems to confront them, and the avoidance of which makes apostasy seem still more attractive, they must look to Jesus and realize the shame and suffering which were the prelude to His exaltation to the right hand of God; and remember that to those who are conscious of a call to divine sonship suffering is a sign that they are not 'bastards' but God's true children subjected to His loving discipline which, however intense at the time it may seem, has as its aim a fuller life of righteousness. With their eyes on Jesus and conscious of the unseen spectators who are watching their progress, they must restore the enfeebled hands and the paralysed arms to their

former vigour, so that they may run a *straight* course and not fall out through weakness as they listen to the tempter's voice to abandon the struggle (xii. 1-13).

However, the author does not base his appeal to his readers solely on what Jesus has done for them in the past when He died on the cross, or on what He is doing for them in the present as their living high priest, but also on what He will do one day in the future. He directs their attention, as the preachers of the primitive gospel invariably did, to the return of the Lord Jesus and to the final judgment. This supreme event has a two-fold significance. It is both a day of salvation and a day of judgment. On the one hand it will mark the completion of salvation for those who have already believed. 'Christ also,' he writes in ix. 28, 'having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin (χωρίς ἁμαρτίας) to them that wait for him, unto salvation.' His coming will be 'not to deal with sin', as the Revised Standard Version following Moffatt well translates, for He has already dealt with it, but to make perfect the salvation of the believers. A similar thought underlies Paul's reference to the 'first-fruits or 'first-instalment' of the Spirit, which the believer has already received but which is an earnest of better things to come at the Parousia of the Lord (see 2 Cor. i. 22, v. 5; Rom. viii. 23). If the readers are not to miss that salvation, they must manifest

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far greater patience than they have as yet shown. The thought of the Lord's return, and it clearly may be in the very near future, should stimulate them to greater effort and at the same time console them by the knowledge that the period of their sufferings may not be long. To be among those who eagerly and confidently await their Lord's return, those who in the words of 2 Tim. iv. 8 'love his appearing', ought to be their main ambition; so he bids them provoke one another to charity and good works so much the more as they see that day approaching (x. 24, 25).

To strengthen their conviction that the Lord will return, he quotes in x. 37, 38, a passage from Hab. ii. 3ff. In the Hebrew original of these verses the prophet is reassured that the vision which he has seen of approaching salvation, at a time when his people are a prey to foreign invaders, will certainly come and not delay; and that the righteous man will live as a result of his faithfulness, while the boastful confidence of the invader will be his ruin. The Septuagint somewhat changed the sense of the passage by substituting the coming of a personal saviour (ἐρχόμενος) for the 'coming' or 'realization' of the vision. Our author, in quoting the Septuagint version, inserts the definite article before ἐρχόμενος and thereby is able to apply the verse to the second coming of Jesus. At that coming the soul that has shrunk back from God through fear of suffering, as the readers were being tempted to do, will be one in whom He will be able to take no pleasure, while on the other hand the righteous man who has faith will go on living as a result of that faith.

Final judgment, whether exercised by Jesus at His return or not, is the prerogative of God, who is expressly designated in xii. 23 as the 'judge of all'. His standard of judgment will, however, be the final word of revelation spoken through Jesus His Son. We cannot then, says our author, expect to escape if we neglect this great salvation (ii. 3), and the thought of this judgment must be a constant source of terror to apostate Christians. It was God's wrath which excluded the apostate generations of Israelites from enjoying His rest in the land of promise in the days of Joshua, and the same wrath will exclude all those who deliberately reject the promise of enjoying that rest which God is still offering to mankind (iv. 11). The God who is

the final judge is the God who has spoken and revealed His will to Moses and in Christ. When He spake on earth by Moses, the shaking of the earth which accompanied the revelation of His

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will was evidence of the power of Him who was speaking, and no transgression of the words spoken by Moses went unpunished. To turn aside from Him, who has come direct from heaven to utter God's final word to man, must a *fortiori* bring with it greater condemnation. The prophet Haggai (ii. 6) had prophesied that there would be one more shaking of the earth and heaven by God, and that final shaking came when He, who was described by Haggai in the following verses as 'the desire of all nations', came from heaven. From that moment a new heavenly order has superseded the earthly order of the law, and the shaking of earth and heaven by the word of God spoken through His Son will go on, so our author implies, till the final shaking of earth and heaven, which the New Testament foretells as the prelude of His second coming and the consummation which will follow it: for, in Westcott's words, 'The writer makes no absolute distinction between the beginning and consummation of the age which was inaugurated by Jesus on earth, between the first coming of Christ and the final judgment.' But though material things may perish, and heaven and earth pass away, the Christian in receiving the gospel has received 'an unshakeable kingdom' of grace by which he can 'render service well-pleasing to God', and this is the abiding source of his confidence and boldness as he contemplates the approaching day of judgment.

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