

MISSIONARY METHODS IN THE TIMES OF THE
APOSTLES.

III.

IN addition to the dexterity with which these Christianized Jews succeeded in suiting themselves to circumstances, in remodelling their doctrine, and in now raising and then lowering their demands, the tenacity especially arouses our wonder with which, in spite of all their failures, they again and again renewed their attempts to make the course of Church History go backwards. We get a very lively impression of this tenacity if we glance at the Apocryphal literature connected with the name of Clement of Rome. The various versions, in which we possess this romance with a purpose, can hardly have appeared before the middle of the third century, while the other writings of the same Judaistic and also Gnostic tendency of which we possess some information, partly from their insertion in the Clementine romance and partly from other sources, must all belong to the period between 130-230. It is astonishing how tenaciously certain Jewish Christian circles clung to their hatred of St. Paul and to their claim of supreme authority in the mission field. They would not even allow that St. Paul was a Jew by birth, but a Greek from Tarsus both on the father's and mother's side. Having come to Jerusalem, he is said to have fallen in love with the daughter of the High Priest, and, in order to attain the goal of his desire, he submitted to circumcision. As, in spite of this, his hope was unfulfilled, hatred of the law and of Judaism took possession of his heart.¹ Outwardly still a follower of Judaism, he prevented the Jewish nation as a people from accepting the Christian faith. The testimony of the twelve Apostles and of the Bishop, St.

¹ According to *Epiphani. Hær.* 30, 16, 25; further, according to *Clem. Recogn.* i. 43-71, and *Epist. Petri ad Jac.* 2 (Clementine ed. Lagarde, pp. 3, 24).

James, had succeeded in making the people of Jerusalem and even Caiaphas ready to accept baptism, when this pestilent fellow lit up Jewish fanaticism and brought about the first persecution of Christian Israel from Jerusalem to Damascus. But St. Paul ever remained "this pestilent fellow," even after he had accepted the Christian confession and had given the Gentiles teaching which was contrary to the law. The name of St. Paul is avoided in writings intended for distribution outside the party; and, in one version of the Clementine romance, he is introduced in the guise of Simon Magus in order, amongst other things, to conceal his name the more carefully. At the same time this artifice gave shape to a very fantastic representation of the history of missions. Just as Simon Magus, by his teaching and arts, had deluded the people of Samaria, before Simon Peter gained the victory there for the true faith and restored the connexion with the Church at Jerusalem, so had it always been, and so must it ever be according to the prophecy of Jesus, throughout the whole extent of missions. First a false teacher must spread a lying gospel in the world; then only will the true gospel follow, like light after darkness, healing after sickness, and it must take place indeed by means of the prudent distribution of secret writings by hidden ways.¹ In order to trace back this anti-Pauline mission, which, according to the supposed prophecy of Jesus, was really only to begin after the destruction of Jerusalem, to the earliest apostolic times, and thus to base it on the authority of St. Peter and more especially of St. James, it was necessary to become involved in the most extraordinary contradictions. St. James, own brother to Jesus, was not only the Bishop of Jerusalem and of the Church of the Hebrews, but at the same time the chief of all bishops, the Archbishop of the whole

¹ *Clem. Hom.* ii. 17; *Recogn.* iii. 61; *Epist. Petri ad Jac.* and *Diamartyria Jacobi.*

Church, and not least the head of all missions to the Gentiles; for it was the task of missions to make the original monotheistic religion, which, in spite of manifold corruptions, had been inherited by the Hebrews, established by law, and brought to perfection by Jesus, the universal religion. But it was from St. James that even the Apostles received the commission as to where they were to carry on this work, and to St. James they had to give yearly an account of their preaching and of its success amongst the heathen. All the threads of missionary and Church government were gathered up in the hands of this Pope of Jerusalem.¹

These were dreams of a comparatively late period. One scarcely knows whether most to marvel at the audacity with which they dared to pour them forth when all possibility of their fulfilment was precluded, or at the want of judgment with which Catholic Christians read these things and translated them into Latin and Syriac, as though they were harmless legends, or even narratives worthy of belief. But still they were magnificent dreams, and they reflect the wishes and aspirations of a tendency which called itself Christian, and which showed great activity in the domain of missions in apostolic times. If missions had been conducted according to the hearts' desire of many Jewish Christians in the earliest times, it would have been on the lines imagined in the second and third centuries. They did not fail in effort; their actions show plenty of system and method; the wisdom of the serpent was certainly not wanting, but how much more was lacking the harmlessness of the dove!

This is an unpleasant picture, but it belongs to the first classical period of the history of missions, when founda-

¹ Compare the beginnings of the *Epist. Petri ad Jac.*, and *Clementis ad Jac.*; further *Clem. Hom.* i. 20, xi. 35; *Recogn.* i. 43, 66, 68 (*episcoporum princeps* in contrast to Caiaphas as *sacerdotum princeps*), 72, iv. 35, ix. 29.

tions were laid ; and in their further course we often stumble on doubtful, or suspicious, and even absolutely repulsive forms. With regard to this or that appearance, we are doubtful whether, like St. Paul, we should overcome rightful indignation and say "that Christ only may be preached," or whether, with the same St. Paul, we must describe men who are looked upon by others as "chief Apostles" as the "servants of Satan." There is some consolation in the thought that, even in apostolic times, the light of the gospel was not only borne through the world by the children of light. In other anxieties we may draw a nobler consolation from the fact that the sincere souls who in those days helped in the gigantic work of founding the Church in the Roman Empire with blessing and success, were by no means all of them "chosen vessels."

III.

The missionaries whose mode of work I have hitherto attempted to describe were Jewish missionaries. Some of them were true Israelites without guile ; others were true Israelites, but afflicted with many of the displeasing qualities which mark the Jews of the present day, and who had either withdrawn themselves from the quickening power of the gospel, or had not fully accepted it. But he, too, was a Jew who could say of himself, without boasting, that he had laboured more abundantly than any other missionary of his own time (1 Cor. xv. 10). This fact, which is also revealed by the caricature which was drawn of St. Paul by Jewish hatred, should induce us, before all things, to examine his missionary work, in order to see whether, and by what means it realized the ideal set up by Jesus. Added to this we have sufficient knowledge of his missionary work, though not of that of the older Apostles, to understand his methods in some measure. The methods of the other Apostles lose themselves in darkness in which

there is only here and there a glimmer of light, and which even then is only faintly illuminated by the *ignis fatuus* of tradition. Neither have we any trustworthy knowledge of such men as Barnabas, Mark, Silvanus, and others, who worked for a time with St. Paul, apart from their connection with him. The church of the next generation, which, besides the Gospels, found the chief source of her edification in the Epistles of St. Paul, was accustomed to call him simply "the Apostle." He was "the missionary" unequalled by any, because, in his mode of working, he united the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.

It is true, indeed, that in the life of St. Paul we do not fail to see the immediate interposition of the supernatural and his unconditional surrender to the impulses thus roused in him. He became a Christian, and at the same time a missionary by an experience which had as powerful and enduring an effect as many years of intercourse with Jesus had exercised on the other Apostles. Immediately after his conversion, and without premeditation and definite plans, he witnessed to his new faith in the synagogue of Damascus, to which he had been led by very different intentions.¹ When he returned to Jerusalem, three years later, he supposed that, because of his past history, he was especially called to preach there to his former companions in the faith, and this he began to do. The opposition he experienced and the danger which threatened him did not suffice to restrain him. By means of a vision in the temple he was directed to go far away to distant heathen lands.² Dates make it very probable that it was not only the

¹ Acts ix. 19-22, xxvi. 20. Also in 2 Cor. xi. 32 Damascus would not have been mentioned if that which was experienced there had not been connected with the work of St. Paul's calling, for from v. 23 his sufferings in his work are treated of. On the other hand (Gal. i. 17) we can leave Arabia out of consideration.

² Acts xxii. 17-21, ix. 26-29, xxvi. 20; Rom. xv. 19.

summons of Barnabas that induced him, many years later, to give up the quiet life he had been leading at Tarsus and to make his appearance as a Christian teacher at Antioch, but that it was a vision, pictured by him in such vivid terms fourteen years later, that made him take the decisive step.¹ When he journeyed to Jerusalem with Barnabas to the so-called Apostles' Council, it was not the requests of those who were around him, but a revelation, that overcame his reluctance to take a step so open to misconception. Prophetic voices arose in his own soul, or in those of his companions, on his second missionary journey, and prevented his following his self-chosen way. A vision in a dream at Troas directed him to Europe. Later a vision in the night kept him longer at Corinth than he would have deemed advisable had he followed his own inclination. The prophetic voices, which set imprisonment and suffering before him on his last journey to Jerusalem, were not despised by him, although he did not conclude from them that it was the will of God that he should give up his own plans. When all that the prophets had prophesied, on the way came to pass in Jerusalem, a vision in the night assured him that, in spite of all, his own instinct had guided him aright, and that he should yet bear witness for Jesus in Rome. And when, during the stormy sea voyage to Rome, the ship's crew lost all heart and hope, he, reassured by the appearance of an angel in the night, was firmly convinced that he and all his travelling companions would reach the end of their journey in safety. His whole missionary life was interwoven with visions and revelations, as with signs and wonders, according to the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, and according to St. Paul's own assertions; and he saw the

¹ I combine 2 Cor. xii. 1-5, on chronological grounds, as already hinted at above, with Acts xi. 25. In what follows I hold to Gal. ii. 1, with which I think Acts xv. 2 may well be united.

hand of God, not only in such extraordinary events, but also in unforeseen events of lesser importance which intervened, and to have kept to his own plans in opposition to that guidance would have seemed to him human defiance, which was quite unlawful.¹ He would not be wise in his own conceit, and he allowed himself to be led through life like a child, believing in wonders. But, in spite of all this, we see him carrying out the work of his calling on such a grand scale, with such far-reaching consideration as to means and objects, and with such distinctly impressed methods that we cannot help seeing in them causes which materially helped to bring about great results.

We see St. Paul, on the first missionary journey which he took with Barnabas, already carrying out some of the principles which he formulated and which he constantly applied. They must have been decided on from the first, and, indeed, even then St. Paul appeared completely equipped. He had had time in which to arm himself. Six years at least must have been spent by St. Paul at Tarsus after his conversion before Barnabas sought him out and drew him into work at Antioch, and even then he was working as a teacher in Antioch for a considerable time before he journeyed as a missionary to Cyprus and Asia Minor. The years spent at Tarsus must be looked upon as chiefly a time of preparation. Although St. Paul may have used any opportunities that offered themselves to tell others of his faith, he did not carry on any missionary work worth mentioning. He remained in his native town, though from the first the goal had been fixed far away for him. He must have been waiting for the more definite guidance of which the prospect had been held out to view by the voice in the Temple: "I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles." He felt but little the need of being taught by

¹ Comp. 2 Cor. i. 15-17 with 1 Cor. xvi. 5-8; or 2 Cor. ii. 5-11 with 1 Cor. v. 3-5.

men, but he felt most certainly the need of learning. As a scholar by profession, he would naturally apply himself to study during that time of waiting. That new world which faith in Jesus Christ had opened out to him must be thoroughly investigated by the methods which he had learnt to apply at the feet of Gamaliel. The old and the new must be thoroughly analysed, and, as far as possible, welded together. If he had already, even then, become convinced that heathen lands, and not Palestine, were to be the field of his labours, there can be no doubt that he must have prepared himself for this his special task. The Rabbinical education he had received in Jerusalem had been clothed in Hebrew; the speech and culture of Gentile civilized lands were overwhelmingly Greek. The exact knowledge of the Greek translation of the Old Testament shown by the letters of St. Paul, the traces also of acquaintance with Greek literature and popular philosophy which we find in them, are most easily accounted for as the result of studies carried on by St. Paul during those quiet years at Tarsus. He must also have pondered over the ways and means by which the gospel might best be brought nigh to all nations.

St. Paul's first rule, which he followed from the beginning wherever he found a Jewish community, was to appear first in the synagogue as a travelling Rabbi and to use the opportunity thus afforded him to preach at the Sabbath service in connexion with the reading of the Parāshas and Hephtāras. The result was always the same, though sometimes it followed slowly, sometimes quickly. His words found an echo in the hearts of some of the Jews, and in some of the Gentiles who attended the service in the synagogue. He was then obliged to depart out of the synagogue, with his Christian preaching, and to gather together, by the side of the Jewish community, another community, formed chiefly of Gentiles, to hear the Word.

The accounts in the Acts of the Apostles have been often questioned. It has been thought intolerable that St. Paul should have acted in the manner described with his clear knowledge of his call to mission work amongst the Gentiles. It is true St. Paul recognized that the distinctive object of his call and conversion was the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, and as a matter of fact it formed the distinctive feature of his apostolic labours.¹ But he looked upon his task as Apostle to the Gentiles as only a special side of his apostolic calling, to which there was also another.² When necessary, he could describe his apostolic calling, which he, like many others, had received, in its fullest universality, and for which he was as fully qualified as the Twelve; he always kept the conversion of Israel before his eyes as the final object of all his work among the Gentiles. When he spoke of the renunciations he had made in the interest of his calling for the saving of souls, he always spoke first of the Jews. He showed himself a Jew that he might gain the Jews, and then only did he turn to the Gentiles, without law, on whose account he had renounced the mode of life, natural to him as a law-abiding Jew, in order that he might win the Gentiles (1 Cor. ix. 19-21). In face of his oft-expressed conviction of the historic and religious precedence of Israel, and his intense longing for the conversion of his fellow-countrymen, it would have been absolutely incomprehensible had he given up making any attempt, whenever he came across any Jewish community, to win it for that gospel with which it

¹ Gal. i. 16; Rom. xv. 15-18; Eph. iii. 1-12; Col. i. 24-27; 1 Tim. ii. 7.

² Rom. xi. 13 ff. On the other hand, in Rom. i. 5 St. Paul is no more speaking of himself alone, when he makes use of the plural, than he is anywhere else; but, as there is no indication of a limitation to a narrower circle, he includes all with himself who, like him, had received grace and apostleship, and, therefore, first of all the twelve Apostles, as Chrysostom had already recognized; and, in accordance with this, he therefore designates the whole of mankind divided into nations as the common field of his own labours and of all the other Apostles. Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts i. 8.

had not previously been brought into close contact. In the history of religion, as St. Paul understood it, it was considered a sacred duty that the gospel should be first preached everywhere to the Jews. What could have prevented him from fulfilling this duty? Certainly not an aversion for his people; for he loved them in spite of his knowledge of their deeply-rooted prejudices, and in spite of all his bitter experiences. Neither would the fact that the majority of the Jewish people in the mother country, headed by the magistrates, had rejected Christ, and had steadily repudiated the witness of the older Apostles. Surely St. Paul saw the hand of God in this, and was confirmed in his conviction by the experiences that everywhere were his. But yet it was not a destiny which made impossible the conversion of individual Jews, such as he himself was, and which set aside the duty of missions to the Jews, or that shut out all hope of success therein, either in the Dispersion or in the mother country. Neither was there anything in the mode and circumstances of his own conversion, which pledged him from the first to give himself up entirely to missionary work among the Gentiles.¹ The message to Ananias refers, it is true, to Gentiles and to kings, but also to the sons of Israel, before whom St. Paul should bear witness to the Name of Christ, and it was not till three years later that he learned from the vision in the temple that he was to be sent to the far-distant Gentile peoples instead of remaining any longer in Jerusalem. But there were also Jews to be found everywhere whose decision for or against their Messiah had yet to be brought about. The agreement of St. Paul and Barnabas with the older Apostles, on the occasion of the Apostles' Council, according to which the former should work amongst the Gentiles and the latter amongst the Israelites, was no

¹ Acts ix. 15, xxii. 15, 21, xxvi. 16 f., 20. The short period of preaching in Jerusalem remained of importance to him (Rom. xv. 19).

hindrance to his turning everywhere and first of all to the Jews (Gal. ii. 7-10). For, in the first place, this had not been decided on by an appeal to a Divine commission, by means of which the spheres of work had been fixed in the first instance, but on the ground of the well known and accomplished fact that God had given success to St. Peter principally among the circumcised and to St. Paul principally among the Gentiles. So it came to pass in accordance with this fact. In acting thus St. Peter no more repented of his journey to Cornelius as an infringement of his trust, or bound himself unsympathetically to pass by any Gentiles who might come in his way, than St. Paul bound himself to avoid for the future the synagogues of the Dispersion. The meaning of the agreement cannot surely have been that in one and the same place, e.g. in towns such as Ephesus and Corinth, the older Apostles were to preach to the Jews and St. Paul to the Gentiles. Apart from the fact that events did not take this course, the main object of the agreement would have been absolutely missed thereby; for it was made in order to avoid disturbances, such as had been caused by the intrusion of missionaries from Palestine into the community at Antioch. In the best sense of the word each was to go his own way without crossing the other's path. It was not by external co-operation, but by the consciousness of oneness in the faith, and by the manifestation of love that the unity of the Church and the fruitful progress of missions was to be preserved. The division of labour, therefore, was only beneficial in marking out the boundary lines of the field of labour geographically, and not ethnographically or statistically. At the same time also it was understood as only a temporary arrangement. While St. Paul carried on missions to the Gentiles with the idea that he might yet live to see their wholesome reaction on Israel, the older Apostles did not forget that their Master had assigned the

whole world to them as their mission field. And the hour came when the leaders amongst them, who were still living, crossed the borders of the Holy Land for ever.

St. Paul would also have proved himself to be a very unpractical thinker, that is, possessed of very limited powers and a very unskilful missionary, had he resigned the advantages which were offered by the existence of a Jewish Dispersion. These Jewish communities, scattered all over the Roman Empire, had already done missionary work, and were still going on with it, so that to have refused to link his work on to theirs would have been unpardonable folly. It was a grand thing that in almost all the important towns from Persia to Spain there were places where the law and the prophets were read aloud and expounded, and that, before the first beginnings of Christian missions, many thousands of those who were not Jews were listening devoutly to this Jewish preaching, and were inclined towards the Jewish faith in the one living God of Creation and Révelation, and were ready to accept Jewish customs. To the missionary to the Gentiles the synagogue formed a natural bridge to that portion of the heathen population which was open to religious impressions. St. Paul found an audience in the synagogue itself which was composed of Gentiles, who, as well as the Jews by birth and the actual proselytes, had been under the educational influence of the synagogue, though not formally and fully incorporated into the Jewish community; those God-fearing men who are so often mentioned as amongst the first hearers of St. Paul's sermons.¹ Where was the missionary to the Gentiles more likely to come across Gentiles looking for salvation than in the synagogue? He might also have stood at the corners of the streets and in the market place, and he might have entered into conversation with Gentiles passing

¹ Acts xiii. 16-26, 43-50, xiv. 1, xvi. 14, xvii. 4, 17, xviii. 4-7; comp. x. 2-22.

by. Analogies would not have been wanting in the life of those times. Not only jugglers and soothsayers, but philosophers also were wont thus to carry on their work. Neither is this mode entirely absent from the history of St. Paul. He appears to have preached to the people in Lystra in the public place. He seems from the first, in Athens, not only to have preached in the synagogue on the Sabbaths, but also to have entered daily into conversation in the market place with every one. He proved how hazardous it was on both occasions. It caused an outbreak of superstition among the people, in Lystra, which was only quelled with difficulty. In Athens it resulted in law-proceedings, not seriously meant, in the time-honoured Areopagus, between men satiated with Academic culture, and the Jewish preacher of the gospel of Jesus and the Resurrection. The right words were not lacking to the Apostle in this dubious position. But the success of his work in Athens must have been very slight. When he afterwards arrived in Corinth in a very depressed state of mind, and limited himself more strictly than ever to preaching in the synagogue, and then only on the central truths of the gospel,¹ it was evidently the result of the experiences he had gone through in Athens. These experiences taught the Apostle that direct missionary work amongst the Gentiles, when quite unprepared, promised little success, and strengthened him in a method which in itself corresponded to his inmost convictions.

The bridge between Israel and the Gentiles, with which the synagogue provided him, was not only passable, but often proved fairly strong and safe for the Christian missionary. Months passed by in Ephesus and Corinth before St. Paul found himself obliged to leave it, and to gain for ever a firm footing in Gentile quarters. He succeeded everywhere in bringing over some Jews with himself, often lead-

¹ Cor. ii. 1-5; Acts xviii. 1-8.

ing members, and always the best elements of the Jewish community. These, united with the God-fearing Hellenists, who had first joined the Jewish synagogue and then had accepted the Christian teaching, formed the nucleus of the newly founded Christian communities. This in itself was great gain. The Jewish root of the overwhelming Gentile Christian communities was in itself an element of good order, training, and custom. St. Paul always held firmly the doctrine that man could never attain to righteousness and blessedness by keeping the law, and he always fought courageously for the freedom of his communities in the main from the Mosaic law, but he was also convinced that the moral ideas and customs of those who had grown up in heathenism were incompatible with the life of a Christian. He felt that the Gentile Christians must accept not only the faith, but also a new moral order of individual and social life from the missionaries and the members of the communities who had been grown up in Judaism.

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(To be continued.)