

*A POINT IN THE CHRISTOLOGY OF FIRST
CORINTHIANS.*

CANON LIDDON, in one of his Bampton Lectures, says :
 " The faith, delivered once for all, had been given to the Church in its completeness by the Apostles. But the finished intellectual survey and treatment of the faith is a superadded acquirement ; it is the result of conflict with a hostile criticism, and of devout reflections matured under the guidance of the Spirit of truth. . . . Heresy indirectly contributed to form the Church's mind : it gave point and sharpness to current conceptions of truth by its mutilations and denials ; it illustrated the fatal tendencies of novel lines of speculation, or even of misleading terms ; it unwittingly forced on an elucidation of the doctrines of the Church by its subtle and varied opposition."

The idea here expressed is a familiar one. To those who take exception to this or that expression in the Creed we are able to point out that the addition of each and every defining phrase, which to those who have had no theological training may seem needless or even unmeaning, was not due to the gratuitous perversity of the Church, but rather was forced on the Church by the subtlety of inquiring minds. " Heresy indirectly contributed to form the Church's mind." This forming of the Church's mind, or the gradual definition of doctrine, is moreover usually assigned to the ages subsequent to the close of the New Testament canon. It would be irrelevant here to discuss the question as to the possibility of fixing a limit to this process of doctrinal evolution, but all orthodox theologians, I think, would agree with the opening words of the above quotation from Canon Liddon : " The faith, delivered once for all, had been given to the Church in its completeness by the Apostles." That is to say, all the decisions of later

councils are only explanations or systematic arrangements of statements in Scripture. This is certainly the teaching of the Anglican Church. In one of her Articles it is distinctly stated that the reason why "the Three Creeds ought thoroughly to be received and believed" is because "they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture." A similar finality is asserted, at least in theory, by the Roman Church for the teaching of the Apostles. The Roman theory cannot be better expressed than it is by Father Clarke in the *Nineteenth Century* for February. "Christ bequeathed to the Church a body of dogma, clear, definite, and unmistakable, which was to be the substance of all its future teaching. This sacred deposit He placed in the hands of His twelve Apostles. After the death of the last of them no sort of addition was to be made to it." Father Clarke indeed assures his readers that the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin and of Papal Infallibility were included in this original and unalterable body of dogma. The fact, however, remains that by the general consent of the Christian Church what we may call creative inspiration in matters doctrinal ceased with the Apostles. Their teaching bears the same relation to the theology of subsequent ages that the phenomena of nature do to the systematized conclusions of scientific investigators.

But although this is so, yet it is possible to trace within the pages of the New Testament something of the same "development by explanation" which we are wont to restrict to the ages of the councils, and to the times when the Holy Spirit works in the Church by ordinary means. I do not mean that the creed of the year 33 A.D., if it had been formulated, would have differed in essentials from the creed of the year 100 A.D., but that certain secondary matters of doctrine, certain corollaries of fundamental tenets, owe their expression in the New Testament, and

consequently their place in systems of theology, to controversies current in apostolic times. And this is the case not only with regard to matters of temporary interest, such as the obligation of the Mosaic Law, but also with regard to certain aspects of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, all of which are, of course, of permanent importance. Take, for example, the whole conception of the high-priestly work of Christ, His finished sacrifice, His unceasing priestly intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, which is so exhaustively elaborated in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The promulgation of this doctrine in that form was immediately due to the danger of a relapse into Judaism on the part of some Hebrew Christians, we know not how numerous or how important. This occasional enunciation of Christian doctrine is peculiarly noteworthy in the writings of St. Paul. When we read his Epistles, we are struck by the great variety of conceptions of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ which seem to have impressed themselves upon his mind; and careful study frequently reveals to us that these different aspects of Christ and of His functions were suggested apparently to St. Paul by the practical or ethical lesson that was under consideration at the time. To take one example: There are few phrases which have had a greater influence in directing the trend of modern theological thought than the words by which St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Philippians, characterizes the Incarnation. "Christ Jesus," he says, "emptied Himself"—*ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε*. Volumes have been written, and probably will be written, on *the kenosis*; and yet this momentous expression occurs quite casually in the letter, not in a formal disquisition on the Incarnation, but in the course of the enforcement of a practical lesson. St. Paul has been inculcating on the Philippians the duty of the cultivation of the Christian grace of humility, "in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself."

There then rises to his mind the great example and model of humility, and this almost accidental mention of the Lord Jesus is providentially made the occasion of theological statements of vast importance. "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men." The modern student, as he reads these words, thinks almost exclusively of the inferences that have been drawn from them by Christian thinkers. St. Paul, we may be sure, was seeking rather to impress on his readers the example of Christ's condescension than to make a contribution to dogmatic theology.

This is only one of many examples that might be adduced in illustration of the fact that the various aspects of the Divine Person of Christ, and the language in which those aspects are expressed to us, are often conditioned by the topics, ethical or practical, which happened at the time to be chiefly occupying the thoughts of the writer.

Let us now turn to the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and try if this principle will afford us any assistance in explaining one of its peculiarities.

If we read the Epistle with a view to gathering from it passages bearing on the Person of Christ, we are at once struck by the fact that in this letter the Catholic doctrine of the "subordination," as it is technically called, of God the Son to God the Father is more strongly and unmistakably expressed than in any other book of the New Testament.

This "subordination," which by no means implies either inferiority of nature, or posteriority in origin, is indicated in the wording of the Nicene Creed, "Light of Light, very God of very God"—the Son being begotten of the unoriginate and self-existent Father.

The doctrine in question is no doubt conveyed elsewhere in the New Testament, as in our Lord's own words, recorded by St. John, "the Father is greater than I"; or in the phrase found more than once in the Epistles, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." But these phrases are by no means so striking as three that occur in First Corinthians. First we have the grand climax with which the third chapter closes: "All are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Again in the eleventh chapter, where St. Paul is regulating the attire of women in public worship, "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God." And, lastly, in the fifteenth chapter, where the Apostle turns seer, and transports us to the end of time, and a revelation, far more remarkable than any in the Apocalypse, is given us of the future mutual relations of the Persons of the Godhead, "And when all things have been subjected unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all."

In view of these passages it must be confessed that if the First Epistle to the Corinthians were the only extant work of St. Paul, if we had to judge from this Epistle alone, it would not be easy to deny that his beliefs as to the Person of Christ differed considerably from those held by St. John. It is true that the general mental attitude of the Apostle towards the Lord Jesus, throughout the Epistle, implies a conviction of the Divinity of the Saviour. But these three passages at once arrest attention, and although they are quite in harmony with the Catholic faith when set forth in its completeness, yet they could be easily strained to favour an Arian interpretation. They mark, in fact, the extreme limit of the Catholic faith on the tide where it most nearly approaches Arianism, just as another phrase of St. Paul's, "Our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," may be taken

as marking the extreme limit on the other side, where it borders on Sabellianism.

We now naturally ask ourselves why these emphatic and startling assertions of the subordination of God the Son to God the Father should be found in First Corinthians particularly. We have already seen that the varying aspects in which the Person and work of Christ are brought before us in St. Paul's Epistles have a relation more or less close to the topics which were occupying the Apostle's mind at the time.

In the present case there does not seem at first sight any connexion between the doctrine of the subordination of the Son to the Father, and the context in which each several statement occurs. The expressions "Christ is God's," and "the head of Christ is God," and that about the future subjection of the Son to the Father, might each be removed from their respective contexts without any injury to the argument. The climax in each case would be impoverished, but that is all. Now this suggests to us that there must have been some undercurrent in the writer's mind to account for the appearance, one might almost say the intrusion, of these statements. This disturbing influence, I believe, will be found in the peculiar heresy on the resurrection of the dead which seems to have been held by some of the Corinthian Christians. We gather from this Epistle that some professing Christians, while they admitted that Christ had risen from the dead, yet found a great difficulty in believing that they themselves would rise. The intellectual difficulties that haunt our minds also haunted theirs, "How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come? Others again, as we learn from the Pastoral Epistles, supplemented this negative scepticism with a positive mysticism, "saying that the resurrection is past already," this resurrection being the metaphorical or spiritual one indicated by St. John when he says, "We know that we have passed

out of death into life because we love the brethren," a resurrection which is effected potentially at our baptism and realized in our daily renovation, the resurrection for which we pray when we say, "We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness." This was the only resurrection looked for by these early heretics.

It is, however, most important to remember that with all this mystic scepticism they seem to have admitted the literal truth of the resurrection of Christ. St. Paul lays special emphasis on this point in the opening words of his disquisition on the subject. "Now I make known unto you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received"; and he closes his enumeration of the appearances of the risen Lord with the words, "So we preach, and so ye believed."

The argument which follows turns chiefly on the logical inconsistency between belief in the past resurrection of Christ and disbelief in the future resurrection of the dead. "Now, if Christ is preached that He hath been raised from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised." The two positions seemed to St. Paul utterly inconsistent. And yet it is to be feared that amongst those who worship in our churches now there are some who, though they do not talk about it, take precisely the same view. On the one hand they see clearly enough that the evidence that Jesus Christ rose from the dead the third day is as convincing, to say the least, as that for any acknowledged historical fact. The evidence, indeed, is the greatest possible. But, on the other hand, another part of their brain is ever listening to the haunting question, "How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?" After a certain number of years an opened grave discloses absolutely

nothing that can be recognised as a particle of a human body. Nothing is more absolutely certain than that the matter of which our bodies are composed is resolved after our death into the common matter of the universe. The physical fact, with all its horror and pathos, strikes the imagination, all the more that we shrink from it; and unless it be overbalanced by a strong faith in the promises of God, and by a vivid realization of the unseen, there is a great danger lest it should silently eliminate a belief in our own rising again from the dead from the number of our practical working beliefs. Those who are thus affected are, however, quite sincere when they repeat in the Creed, "The third day He rose again from the dead." If, then, they were asked to reconcile their serious misgivings as to their own resurrection with their historical belief in the resurrection of Christ, I imagine that those who had thought the matter out would reply, Christ stands on a quite different level from us ordinary men and women. Christ, they would say, was God incarnate, miracles surrounded Him from His Conception to His Ascension. I can easily believe of Him what I cannot believe of myself. Now it is this very way of looking at the matter, unconsciously felt or consciously expressed, that St. Paul deals with in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. And St. Paul meets it by insisting on the fact that Christ's humanity is in the same order of being as ours: "If there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised." . . . "we witnessed of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised." . . . "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." It will thus be seen that the reality of Christ's humanity is the keystone of the argument. It was Christ's humanity that was raised from the dead, and that human nature is identical with ours. You cannot

therefore logically admit the truth of the resurrection of Christ, and at the same time disbelieve in the possibility of your own, on the ground that Christ as man belongs to a different order of being.

It is noteworthy that, whereas the Creeds always say of our Lord that "He rose again from the dead" as though it were by His own Divine power, which is indeed most true, and in accordance with His own words, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"; "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again"; yet St. Paul almost always, as here, speaks of Christ as having been raised from the dead. Thus in an earlier portion of the Epistle he says, "God both raised the Lord, and will raise up us through His power," co-ordinating, as in the fifteenth chapter, the resurrection of Christ and that of ordinary human beings.

Now, although the subordination of God the Son to God the Father is a fact in the eternal relations of the Divine Persons, and is quite independent of the Incarnation, yet it would be naturally suggested by an argument based on the dependence of the Son, as incarnate, on His heavenly Father. And when we read the fifteenth chapter, and observe St. Paul's earnestness, his evident conviction that Christianity stands or falls with belief in the future resurrection of the dead, we cannot doubt that, although other topics are first dealt with, yet the Corinthian heresy on the resurrection was present, painfully present, to his mind all along, and that the line of argument by which he proposed to confute that heresy was present too, and unconsciously influenced his thoughts, even when dealing with quite other topics. His argument in chapter xv. would lead him to regard Christ as the first among many brethren, all sons of one Father, rather than as "the image of the invisible God" in whom were all things created, and in whom all things consist. This is the reason, I believe, why such strong

statements of the subordination of the Son to the Father recur again and again.

We may not be able in our present state to make any practical use of what has been revealed to us concerning the mutual relations of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity; but there can be no doubt as to the preciousness of the truth which underlies the argument which St. Paul opposed to the doubters at Corinth. The Lord Jesus Christ really became man, and is man still. His human nature was and is identical with ours. "Since, then, the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death." "God both raised the Lord," with a body the same, yet wondrously glorified, "and will raise up us through His power," no longer "bare grain," but with bodies such as it will please God to give us. Our hopes and our expectations are not, need not be, quite vague and undefined. His human nature, which is our human nature, has been exalted, ennobled, glorified, and to us poor, weak, sin-soiled creatures He has given a promise and a pledge of a like exaltation. A marvellous evolution indeed, a fixed point for the eye of faith to gaze on, an ever-widening vista of illimitable possibilities. For He "shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory," "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

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