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To M D Conway with the writer's kind regards

A DISCOURSE

AGAINST HERO-MAKING

In Religion,

DELIVERED IN SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL, FINSBURY,

APRIL 24TH, 1864.

BY

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*Printed by request, with Enlargements.*

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LONDON:

TRÜBNER AND CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1864.

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?”

“Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. Wherefore let no man glory in men.”

## DISCOURSE

AGAINST

### HERO-MAKING IN RELIGION,

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FOR more than twenty years we have been made familiar with the phrase Hero-Worship. It has been applied not only in the regions of politics and literature, but in religion, as the phrase itself strictly claims. We have been told, from very opposite quarters, that the excellence, as well as the characteristic, of the Christian religion turns on its venerating a personal hero in Jesus of Nazareth. Many who regard Jesus as a mere man, yet insist upon inscribing themselves his servants and followers, and on so wedding their honour for him with their adoration to God most high, as systematically to incorporate the two. Nay, some who utterly disown allegiance to Jesus—who think him to have taught many things erroneously, and to have had nothing supernatural in his character, in his powers, in his knowledge, in his virtue, in his birth, or in his communications with God—still maintain that he is fitly called the Regenerator of mankind, and ought to receive—I know not what acknowledgment—as our Saviour. It appears then not superfluous to bestow a little space on the treatment of this question.

I need hardly observe that personal qualities alone in no case constitute a hero. Action and success must be added; and action cannot succeed until the times are ripe. No one knows this better than the true hero. True genius is modest in self-appreciation, and is fully aware how many other men could have achieved the same results if the same rare conjuncture of circumstances had presented itself to them. Men of genius are fewer than common men, but they are no accident. God has provided for their regular and continuous recurrence; their birth is ordinary and certain in every nation which is counted by millions. The same is true in every form of mental pre-eminence, whether capacity for leadership, or genius for science, or religious and moral susceptibility. Religion, separate from morals, is, of course, only fanaticism. We venerate religion only when built upon pure morals. Moral religion is notoriously a historic growth, and has depended on traditional culture at least as much as what is especially called science; and its progress is not more wayward and arbitrary than that of science, if the whole of human history be surveyed. The present is ever growing out of the past, with a vigour and a certainty which never allow the fortunes of the race to be seriously dependent on any individual. Each of us is, morally as well as physically, a birth out of antecedents. From childhood we are tutored in right and wrong, not only by professed teachers, but by all elder persons who are around us. Improper deeds or words of a child are reprov'd by a servant, or by an elder brother, or even by a stranger, as well as by a parent or a priest. We imbibe moral sentiment, as it were, at every pore of our moral nature; nor do we often know from whom

we learned to abhor *this* course of conduct and to love *that*. Hence no wise man will claim originality for his moral judgments or religious sentiments. A foolish dogma, a fanciful tenet, may easily be original; but a pure sound truth is more likely to have been old. To prove its novelty is impossible, and certainly could not recommend it: on the contrary, the older we can prove it to have been, the greater its ostensible authority. For these reasons, in the theory of morals and religion, a claim of originality can seldom or never be sustained: in this whole field the question is less what a man has taught, than what he has persuaded others. Hundreds of us may have said, truly and wisely: "It is a great pity that Mohammedans, Jews, and Christians of every sect will not unlearn their dissensions, and blend into one religious community." The sentiment must once have been even new; yet its utterance could never have earned praise and distinction. But if any one devoted his life to bring about such union, and succeeded in it, we should undoubtedly regard him as a moral hero; though (as just said) no one *could* succeed, until the fulness of time arrived and the crisis was seized judiciously.

Thus, in discussing the claims put forth for special and indeed exclusive honour to the name of Jesus, we have to consider, not so much what he said, or is said to have said, as what he effected; what impression he actually produced by his life and teaching; what great, noble, abiding results his energies originated and bequeathed. The moment we ask, What are the facts? we seem to be plunged into waves of most uncertain controversy; into discussions of literature unsuitable for short oral treatment. Yet, before the present

audience, I may with full propriety claim as admitted that which greatly clears our way. I presume you to know familiarly, that the picture of Jesus in the fourth gospel is essentially irreconcilable with that in the three which precede, and is neither trustworthy nor credible. The three first gospels, taken by themselves, do present a character, a moral picture, sufficiently self-consistent and intelligible to reason about. But our present question (allow me carefully to insist) is NOT, Do we see in Jesus a remarkable man, a gifted peasant, a dogmatist by whom we may profit, whose noble sentiments we may admire or applaud? but rather, Do we find one who dwarfs all others before and after him? one to whose high superiority sages and prophets must bow; before whom it is reasonable and healthful for those who have a hundredfold of his knowledge and breadth of thought to take the place of little children? Or, at least, Has Europe and the world (as a fact) learned from him what it was not likely to learn without him? Is that TRUE which is dinned into our ears, that Christendom has imbibed *from him* a pure, spiritual, large-hearted, universal religion, adapted to man as man, cementing mankind as a family, and ennobling the individual by a new and living Spirit, unknown to the philosophies, unknown to the priesthoods, untaught by the prophets, before him?

Even if we had no insight as to the comparative value of the several gospels, one broad certainty affords solid ground to plant the foot upon. The positive institutions and active spirit of the first Christian church are notorious and indubitable. On learning what the Apostles established in their Master's name within a few weeks of his death, we know

with full certainty *what they had understood him to teach*, what impression he actually produced, what was the real net result of his life and preaching: and this, in fact, is our main question. Now, it is true beyond dispute—it is conceded by every sect of Christians—that in the first Christian church the Levitical ceremonies were maintained with zealous rigour, and that its only visible religious peculiarity consisted in community of goods. The candidate for baptism professed no other creed but that Jesus was Messiah; and the obedience of the disciple to the Master was practically manifested in the sudden renunciation of private property. This ordinance was not, in theory, compulsory; but, while the fervour of faith was new, it was enforced by the public opinion of the church so sharply, as to tempt the richer disciples to hypocrisy. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is full of instruction. They did not wish to alienate *all* their goods, though they were willing to be very liberal. In deference to the prevailing sentiment, they sold property and gave largely to the church; yet were guilty of keeping back *a part* for themselves secretly. For this fraud (according to the legend) they were both struck dead at the voice of Peter! Such a legend could not have arisen, except in a church which regarded absolute Communism as the characteristic Christian virtue. Higher proof is not needed that Jesus established this duty as the touchstone of discipleship: but, in fact, the account in the three gospels tallies herewith perfectly. Jesus there mourns over a rich young man, as refusing the law of PERFECTION, because he hesitates to sell all his goods; give them to the poor, and become a mendicant friar. When his disciples, commenting on the young man's

failure to fulfil the test, say: "Lo! we have left all and followed thee: what shall we have therefore?" Jesus in reply promises, that, in reward for having sacrificed to him the gains of their industry and abandoning their relatives, they shall sit upon thrones, and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. (In passing I remark, that the idea of such a reward for such a deed is shocking to a Pauline Christian.)

The Jerusalem church was, alone of all churches, founded by the chosen representatives of Jesus on the doctrine of Jesus himself, while the remembrance of that doctrine was fresh. It was a special community, not unlike a "religious order" of modern Europe; and could not be discriminated, by Jews any more than by Romans, from a Jewish sect. In the next century, those who seem to have been its direct successors were called Ebionite heretics by the Gentile Christians. When Paul, who ostentatiously refused to learn anything from the actual hearers of Jesus, had put forth what he calls "his own" gospel—namely, "the mystery that Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs" without Levitical purity—he brought on himself animosity and violent opposition from the Christians of Jerusalem, who were the historical fruit of Jesus' own planting. When Paul was in Jerusalem, one of the leaders called his attention to the fact that, while many thousands of Jews were believers, they were "all zealous of the law;" he therefore advised him to pacify their misgivings and suspicions of him, by performing publicly certain Judaical ceremonies. Paul obeyed him: nevertheless, no such conformities could atone for his offence in teaching that Gentiles, while free from the law, were equal to the Jews before God; and Paul to his last day experienced enmity



from the zealous members of that church. His relations to the other Apostles we know by his own account to have been certainly cold. He seems to be personally pointed at in the Epistle of James, as "a vain man," who preaches faith without works; while he himself (as he tells us) publicly attacked Peter at Antioch as a dissembler and weak truckler to Jerusalem bigotry. When, from first to last, the doctrine of the church at Jerusalem was sternly Levitical, it is quite incredible that Jesus ever taught his disciples the religious nullity of Levitical ceremonies and the equality of Gentiles with Jews before God. But why need I *argue* about this, when it is distinctly clear on the face of the narrative? In the book of Acts the idea that "God is no respecter of persons"—or of nations—breaks upon the mind of Peter as a new revelation, and is said to have been imparted by a special vision. It is not pretended that Jesus had taught it; nor does Paul, in any of his controversies against Judaism, dare to appeal to the authority and doctrine of the earthly Jesus as on his side. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, as also in a passage of Luke (xvi. 17), Jesus declares that he is not come to destroy the law; and that "Rather shall heaven and earth pass away, than shall one *tittle* of the law fail." I am, of course, aware that Christian theologians would have us believe that Luke is here defective, and that the words in Matthew, "Until all be fulfilled," mean "Until my *death* shall fulfil all the *types*." But this would make Jesus purposely to deceive his disciples by a riddle. This is indeed worse than trifling, and a gratuitous imputation on the teacher's truthfulness. He must have known how he was understood. They supposed him to mean that Levitism

was eternal; and he did not correct the impression. It was then the very impression which he designed to make, simply and truthfully; and the disciples, one and all, rightly understood him, and knew it well.

The verse which follows in Matthew clenches the argument; although (I see I must in candour add) I do not believe that Jesus spoke it in exactly this form. Nevertheless, it emphatically shows how the writer interpreted the verse preceding. For he makes Jesus to add: "Wherefore, whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and *shall teach men so*, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." I find myself unable to doubt that these words were written to mean: "Wherefore, one like *Paul*, who breaks the Levitical ceremonies, and teaches the Gentiles to break them, is least in my kingdom; but *James*, and the Apostles in Jerusalem, who do and teach them, are great in my kingdom." The intensity of feeling on this subject was such, that the Jewish Christians easily believed Jesus to have prophetically warned them against Paul's error. Be this as it may, the formula, "break one of these least commandments, and teach men to break it," is in contrast to "fulfilling the law," and distinctly shows that "fulfilling the law" refers to *doing* and *enforcing* even the least commandments.

The Jerusalem church was the product (and, as far as we know, the only direct product) of the teachings of Jesus. Of its sentiment we have an interesting exhibition in the epistle of James; in whom we see a high and severe moralist, pure and exacting, full of righteous indignation against the

oppression of the poor by the rich, and against all haughtiness of wealth. He does not treat all private property as unchristian; but only large property. Evidently no rich man could have seemed venerable to the chief saints in that church. He assumes the guilt of all rich men, and announces misery about to come on them, as does Jesus in the parable of Lazarus: nevertheless, in him all the harshest parts of Jesus' precepts have been softened by the trial of practical life. In fact, this epistle is much in the tone of the very noblest of the Hebrew prophets. As with them, so in him, the moral element is wholly predominant, and nothing ceremonial obtrudes itself. Nay, what is really remarkable, he calls his doctrine the "perfect law of liberty;" so little did those ceremonies oppress him, to which from childhood he had been accustomed. Let due honour be given to this specimen of the first and only genuine Christianity; yet it is difficult to find anything that morally distinguishes it from the teachings of an Isaiah or a Joel. There is certainly a diversity: for the political elements of thought have disappeared, which under the Hebrew monarchy were prominent. The great day of the Lord was no longer expected to glorify the royalty of Jerusalem and its national laws: and in this diversity lay the germ of great changes.

It would be absurd to censure an epistle because it is not a ritual, or to demand in it the fervours of spirituality found in this or that psalm. Nevertheless, in the present connection, I must claim attention to the fact that neither the three Gospels nor the epistle of James have ever been in high favour with that Calvinistic or Augustinian school which most nearly represents Paul to the moderns. To bring out the argument

in hand more clearly, allow me to make a short digression. Morality requires both action and sentiment. No reasonable teacher can undervalue either : yet some moral teachers press more on action, and are said to preach duty and work ; and even make a duty of sentiment, laying down as a *command* that we shall love God, love our neighbours, love not ease, love not self. Other teachers endeavour to excite, foster, and develop just sentiment, and trust that it will generate just action : possibly they even run into the error of shunning definite instruction as to what action is good. Finite and one-sided as we are, two schools naturally grow up among teachers, who may be classed as the preachers of duty and the preachers of sentiment : but perhaps, if the question be distinctly proposed to the ablest men of either school, "Do we learn action from sentiment, or sentiment from action?" they would alike reply (as in substance does Aristotle) that both processes necessarily co-exist. From childhood upward, right action promotes right feeling, and right feeling generates or heightens right action. There is no real or just collision of the two schools. Nevertheless, as a fact of human history easily explained, the preaching of duty and of outward action gains everywhere an early and undue ascendancy, perhaps especially where morals and religion are taught by law, which deals in command and threat. The rude man and the child are subjected to rule more or less arbitrary ; and it is only when intellect rises in a nation or in an individual that the spiritual side of morals receives its proportionate attention. In Greek history, we know the fact in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. Among the Hebrews, a secular increase of spirituality in the highest teachers will probably be con-

ceded by critics of every school to have gone on from the time of the judge Samuel to the writer from whom came the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah. The characteristic difference of the Greek and the Hebrew is this: that, however spiritual the Greek morality might be, it seldom blended with religion; and (with exceptions perhaps only to be found under Hebrew influences, as at Alexandria) the moral affections found no place in religion at all. Now it has been recently asserted by a Theist, that it is to JESUS that we owe that regeneration of religion, which makes it begin and grow *from within*. He is not (it is said) "a mere teacher of pure ethics;" but "his work has been in the *heart*. He has transformed the Law into the Gospel. He has changed the bondage of the alien for the liberty of the sons of God. He has glorified virtue into holiness, religion into piety, and duty into love." Hence it is inferred that "his coming was to the life of humanity what regeneration is to the life of the individual."\*

Deep as is my sympathy with the writer from whom I quote, I am constrained to say that every part of the statement appears to me historically incorrect. It does, in the first place, violent injustice to the Hebrews who preceded Jesus. Did *he* first "glorify virtue into holiness"? Nay, from the very beginning of Hebraism this was done—at least as early as Samuel. Did *he* first "glorify religion into piety"? Is there then no piety in the 42nd Psalm? in the 63rd? in the

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\* I quote from the striking treatise of my friend Miss Cobbe, called "Broken Lights." The whole protest against M. Renan, of which the words above are the summary, should be read to understand their relation. I am authorized to say that she has not even the remotest wish to make honour to Jesus a part of *religion*: she intended to write as a *historian* only.

27th? in the 23rd? Nay, I might ask; from what utterances of Jesus can piety be learned by the man who cannot learn it from the Psalms? Holiness and piety appear to me to have been taught and exemplified quite as effectively before Jesus as since. Surely in the *religion* of the psalmists *piety* dominated, as much as in Fenelon or in the poet Cowper. But finally I have to ask, "Did Jesus glorify duty into love?" And, in order to reply, I turn to the three gospels, as containing our best account of what he taught.

A phenomenon there very remarkable is the severity with which Jesus enforces as duty the most painful renunciations; and the contempt with which he rejects anything short of immediate obedience to his arbitrary demands. I know not whether the narrators have overcoloured him; but they give us, on the one side, examples of prompt obedience to the command, "Follow me:" first, in Andrew and Peter; next, in James and John; who "immediately left the ship *and their father*, and followed him." This is afterwards praised as highly meritorious. On the other side, when Jesus says to a man, "Follow me," and receives the reply, "Lord, suffer me first *to go and bury my father*;" Jesus retorts: "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Another also said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me *first go and bid them farewell* which are at home in my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." The peremptory command to abandon their parents, not bury a dead father, and not even say a word of farewell to the living, is perhaps a credulous exaggeration of the writer; yet it is in close harmony with the whole account, and with the

declaration, "He that hateth not his father and mother, and wife and children, cannot be my disciple:" for evidently the following of Jesus, as interpreted and enforced by himself, involved an abandonment (perhaps to starvation) of these near relatives. It is not my purpose to dwell now on the right or wrong of such precepts, but on the imperious tone in which they are imposed *from without*, not the slightest attempt being made to recommend them to the heart or understanding. Again, in perfect harmony with the same is the reply, already adduced, of Jesus to the rich young man, who comes to ask, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The opportunity was excellent to set forth that no outward actions could bring eternal life, but that such life was an interior and divine state, to be sought by love and faithfulness. Instead of spiritual instruction, Jesus gives a crushing arbitrary command: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." Does such a teacher build *from within* by implanting Love? Does he act upon Love at all, or rather on selfish Ambition? He deals in hard duty and fierce threat; commands too high, and motives too low; thoughts of reward; promises of power; salvation by works; investment of money for returns beyond the grave; prudential adoption of virtue, which may soften judgment, win promotion, deliver from prospective prison and hell fire: topics which at best are elements of Law, as opposed to Gospel. In the opinion of an increasing fraction of the most enlightened Christians, the most noxious element in the popular creed is the eternal Hell: the stronghold of this doctrine is in the discourses of Jesus. But what of Faith? If Faith be a

purely spiritual movement, which cleaves to Goodness and Truth for its own sake, and without regard to selfish interests, it is hard to say in what part of the three gospels it is found. In the mind of Jesus all actions seem to stand in the closest relation to the thoughts of *punishment* or *reward* on a great future day. To lose one's soul means, to be sentenced when that day shall come : cutting off a sin means, escaping mutilated from a future hell. In a religion practically moulded on these discourses, calculation of what we shall hereafter *get* by present obedience inheres as a primary essence. The only faith which Jesus extols, is, faith to work miracles, and faith that he is Messiah and can work them. Inquiry is frowned down and sighed over as unbelief. Power to forgive sin is claimed by him ; and, when this is reproved as impious in a human teacher, the claim is marvellously justified by identifying forgiveness with cure of bodily disease. Add to this the grant of miraculous powers to the Seventy, and a delegation of power to forgive is made out at which Protestants may well shudder. In another place (Luke vii. 4, 5) Jesus declares forgiveness of sin to be earned by personal affection to himself ; but I am bound to add that, on special\* grounds, I do not believe the account.

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\* The narrative in Luke vii. 37—50 seems to be an inaccurate duplicate of that in Matt. xxvi. 6, Mark xiv. 3, John xii. 3 ; which nearly agree as to time and place—viz., it was in Bethany, a little before the last Passover. Matthew and Mark say, it was in the house of Simon the leper : Luke says, of Simon the Pharisee. John calls the woman Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and of Martha : Luke says, a woman notorious for sin. I will here remark, that discussion on the behaviour of Jesus to women of ill fame, which is called "delicate," "beautiful," "characteristic," &c., appears to me wholly without basis of fact. Those who allow no historical cha-



Luke has in some parts added softer touches to Jesus, and gives us two fine parables which it is astonishing that Matthew and Mark omit, while they retail so many that are monotonous: yet even in Luke I seek in vain for anything calculated to implant in the heart a sense of freedom; to excite willing service; or to cherish spiritual desire, gratitude and tranquil love, careless of other reward than love itself. In fact, Luke is sometimes harsher than Matthew. Thus, in vi. 20, "Blessed be ye *pcor*, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye *that hunger now*, for ye shall be filled. . . . But *woe unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full; for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep.*" So indiscriminate and thoughtless are devotees, that such doctrine meets with the same theoretic glorification as the essentially different version of Matthew: "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*. . . . Blessed are ye who hunger and thirst *after righteousness.*" If Matthew be correct and Luke wrong, Luke has foisted upon Jesus curses against rich and mirthful men, in contrast

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racter to the discourses in John will not quote John iv. 16—19, nor John viii. 1—11, against this remark: and nothing remains but Luke vii. 37—50. The fair fame of Mary Magdalene has been blasted by believing this story in Luke, and then identifying her with the woman.

I will add that many who must know seem to forget, that no Greek philosopher—neither an Anaxagoras nor a Zeno, to say nothing of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca—would ever have felt crude or unjust severity towards a woman's faults. If English sentiment sometimes appear harsh against women who have made a trade of themselves, is it not because sins which are gainful to the sinner are more inveterate and more contagious than sins which impoverish him?

to the blessings on poverty and weeping: but if the curses came from the lips of Jesus, Luke gives the opposite clauses justly; in which case Matthew has improved monkish into spiritual sentiment. It would be a hard task to prove Luke's version out of harmony with the constant doctrines of Jesus. To borrow Calvinistic phraseology, and (if my memory serves me) the very words of a Pauline spiritualist: "The three gospels may be read in the churches till doomsday, without converting a single soul." The spiritual side of Christianity, inherited from the Hebrew psalmists, *not* from Jesus, was diffused beyond Judæa, first by the Jewish synagogues, next by the school of Paul, to whom the school of Jesus was in fixed opposition, preaching works and the law, while Paul preached the Spirit and faith. "Though I give all my goods to feed the poor," says Paul, "and give my body to be burned, and have not charity, I am nothing." How vast the contrast here to the doctrine of Jesus: "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and *shall inherit eternal life.*" To make ascetic sacrifices for the honour of Jesus was indeed a surpassing merit in his eyes, unless the most important discourses, even in these three gospels, extravagantly belie him. I am unable to discover on what just ground the opinion stands that the character of Jesus is less harsh, and his precepts less sourly austere than those of John the Baptist. Little as we are told of the latter (all of which is honourable), the two must have had close similarities. Let it be remembered that Apollos is spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles as "instructed in *the*

*way of the Lord*, and fervent in spirit, and teaching diligently *the things of the Lord*," while he "knew only the baptism of John." So also Paul falls in with "certain disciples" at Ephesus, who pass as Christians; yet he presently discovers that they also know only John's baptism. It seems therefore evident, that the two schools had nothing essential to divide them, and were intimately alike. When, on the other hand, the sharp opposition of the Pauline doctrine to that of James and the church of Jesus at Jerusalem is duly estimated, some may think that certain words put into the mouth of John the Baptist will become less untrue if changed as follows: "I indeed *and Jesus* baptize you with water unto repentance and poverty; but *Paul* shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Be that as it may—give as little weight as you please to Paul's strong points—press as heavily as you will on his weak side, out of which came the worst part of Calvinism—the fact remains, that Jesus did not teach Christianity to the Gentiles, or declare them admissible to his church without observing Mosaism; and that to the Jews themselves he preached merely severe precepts, ethical or monkish, with a minimum of what can be called Gospel;—precepts, on which a religious order might be founded, but totally unsuitable for a world-wide religion.

When people calmly tell me that Jesus first established the brotherhood of man, the equality of races, the nullity of ceremonies; that he overthrew the narrowness of Judaism; that he found a national, but left a universal religion; found a narrow-minded ceremonial, and originated a spiritual principle, I can do nothing but reply that every one of these

statements is groundless and contrary to fact. What his disciples never understood him to teach, he certainly did not teach effectually. It is childish to reply that the fault lay in the stupidity of the twelve Apostles. What! could not Jesus speak as plainly as Paul did? Surely, the more stupid the hearer, the more plainly the teacher is bound to speak. If Jesus *had* so spoken, never could want of spirituality in the hearer have made the words unintelligible. Did only the spiritual understand Paul when he proclaimed the overthrow of ceremonies? Could the most stupid of mortals have failed to understand Jesus also, if he had avowed that the Levitical ordinances were a nullity and Gentiles the religious equals of Jews? I may seem to insult men's intellect by pressing these questions; but do not *they* rather insult *our* intellect? For they would have us believe Jesus to have originated doctrines which are the very opposite of all that his actual hearers and authorized expounders established as his, before there was time for his teaching to fade from their memory, and to be modified by novelties supervening.

I have called the primitive church of Jerusalem the only direct product of Jesus. Do I deny that Jesus bore any part *at all* in setting up the creed known in Europe as Christianity? I wish I could wholly deny it. Gladly would I relieve his memory of *all* responsibility for dogmas, whence proceed far more darkness and weakness of mind, confusion, bitterness, and untractable enmities, than his moral teaching can ever dispel; dogmas which as effectually break up good men into hostile sects, with fixed walls of partition between them, as ever did the ceremonialism which he is falsely imagined to

have destroyed. But, hard as it is to know how much of the gospels is historical, I suppose that no one for three centuries at least has doubted that Jesus avowed himself to be MESSIAH, at first privately, at last ostentatiously; and was put to death for the avowal. If so much be historical, we are on firm ground. There is then no room for transcendental philosophies and imaginative theories, as to what authority and honour Jesus was claiming. The Jews of that day familiarly understood that Messiah was to be a Prince from Heaven, who should rule and judge on earth. As to the great outlines of his character and power, manifestly there was no dispute. If the popular notions on this subject were wrong, the first business with Jesus must have been to set them right. But he never discourses against them, nor shows alarm lest he be thought to claim supernatural dignity and lordship: nor could his riding triumphantly on the ass, amid shouts of "Hosanna to the Son of David!" have been intended to discourage the belief that he was to exercise temporal as well as spiritual royalty. The learned and the vulgar were in full agreement that Messiah was to be a supreme Prince and Teacher to Israel, Judge and Lord of all nations: but the rulers regarded it as impious, criminal, and treasonable to aspire to this dignity while unable to exhibit some miraculous credentials. The fixed belief concerning Messiah was gathered, not only from our canonical prophets, but also from the book called "The Wisdom of Solomon" (which was in the Greek Bible of Paul and other Hellenist Jews), and still more vividly from the book of Enoch, which Jude and Peter quote reverentially, and Jude ascribes to the prophet Enoch, the seventh

from Adam. With the discovery of that book early in this century a new era for the criticism of Christianity ought to have begun; for it is evidently the most direct fountain of the Messianic creed. The book of Mormon does not stand alone as a manifest fiction which had power to generate a new religion; the book of Enoch is a like marvellous exhibition of human credulity. A recent German critic has given the following summary of its principal contents:—"It not only comprizes the scattered allusions of the Old Testament in one grand picture of unspeakable bliss, unalloyed virtue, and unlimited knowledge: it represents the Messiah as both King and Judge of the world, who has the decision over everything on earth and in heaven. He is the Son of Man who possesses righteousness; since the God of all spirits has elected him, and since he has conquered all by righteousness in eternity. He is also the Son of God, the Elected one, the Prince of Righteousness. He is gifted with that wisdom which knows all secret things. The Spirit in all its fulness is poured out upon him. His glory lasts to all eternity. He shares the throne of God's majesty: kings and princes will worship him, and will invoke his mercy."\* So much from the book of Enoch; which undoubtedly was widely believed among the contemporaries of Jesus. How much of the self-glorifying language put into the mouth of Jesus was actually uttered by him it is impossible to know. There is always room for the opinion that only later credulity ascribed this

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\* I quote from a summary of the book of Enoch by the German theologian Kalisch, given in Bishop Colenso's Appendix to his 4th volume on the Pentateuch.

and that to him—that (for instance) he did not really speak the parable about the sheep and goats, representing himself as the Supreme Judge who awards heaven or hell to every human soul. But it remains, that this parable distinctly shows the nature of the dignity which Jesus was supposed to claim in calling himself Son of Man; and, even if we arbitrarily pare away from his discourses this and other details in deference to Unitarian surmise, we still cannot get rid of what pervades the whole narrative, that Jesus from the beginning adopted a tone of superhuman authority and obtrusion of his own personal greatness, with the title “Son of Man,” allusive both to Daniel and to the book of Enoch. According to Daniel, one like unto a Son of Man will come in the clouds of heaven to receive eternal dominion over all nations. It is impossible to doubt, that, in the mind of those to whom Jesus spoke, the character of Messiah implied an overshadowing supremacy, a high leadership over Israel, and hereby over the Gentiles, who were to come and sit at Israel’s feet: a religious and, as it were, princely pre-eminence, which only one mortal could receive, who by it was raised immeasurably above all others. If he did not intend to claim this, it was obviously his first duty to *disclaim* it, and to warn all against false, dangerous, or foolish conceptions of Messiah; to protest that Messiah was only a teacher, not a prince, not a divine lawgiver, not a supreme judge sitting on the throne of God and disposing of men’s eternal destinies. Nay, why claim the title Messiah at all, if it could only suggest falsehood? Since he sedulously fostered the belief that he was Messiah, without attempting to define the term, or guide the

public mind, he could only be understood, and must have wished to be understood, to present himself as Messiah in the popular, notorious sense. If he was really this, honour him as such. If his claim was delusive, he cannot be held guiltless.

Every high post has its own besetting sin, which must be conquered by him who is to earn any admiration. A finance minister, who pilfers the treasury, can never be honoured as a hero, whatever the merits of his public measures. A statesman or prince, entrusted with the supreme executive power, ruins his claims to veneration if he use that power violently to overthrow the laws. Such as is the crime of a statesman who usurps a despotism, such is the guilt of a religious teacher who usurps lordship over the taught and aggrandizes himself. It is a bottomless gulf of demerit, swallowing up all possible merit, and making silence concerning him our kindest course, if only his panegyrists allow us to be silent. A teacher who exalts himself into our Lord and Saviour and Judge, leaves to his hearers no reasonable choice between two extremes of conduct. Whoso is not with him is against him. For we must either submit frankly to his claims, and acknowledge ourselves little children—abhor the idea of criticizing him or his precepts, and in short become morally annihilated in his presence—or, on the opposite, we cannot help seeing him to have fallen into something worse than ignominy.

I digress to remark, that a teacher supposed by us to be the infallible arbiter of our eternity would detain our minds for ever in a puerile state if he taught dogmatically, not to say imperiously. If he aimed to elicit our own powers of



judgment, and not to crush us into submissive imbecility, the method which Socrates carried to an extreme appears alone suited to the object ; namely, to refrain from expressing his own decisions, but lay before the hearers the material of thought half-prepared, and claim of them to combine it into some conclusion themselves. In fact, this is fundamentally the mode in which the Supremely Wise, who inhabits this infinite world, trains our minds and souls. His greatness does not oppress our faculties, because it is ever silent from without. Displaying before us abundantly the materials of judgment, he elicits our powers ; never commanding us to become little children, but always inviting our minds to grow up into manhood. But, if there were also an opposite side of teaching healthful to us—if it were well to start from dogmas guaranteed to us from heaven, which it is impiety to canvas—then the matter of first necessity would be, that the uttered decrees to which we are to submit should be free from all enigma, all extravagance of hyperbole, all parable, dark allusion, and hard metaphor, all apparent self-contrariety ; and, moreover, that we should have no uncertainty what were the teacher's precise words, no mere mutilated reports and inconsistent duplicates, but a reliable genuine copy of every utterance on which there is to be no criticism. To sum up, I will say : Nothing can be less suited to *minister the Spirit* and train the powers of the human soul, than to be subject to a superhuman dictation of truth ; and nothing could be more unlike *a divine law of the letter*, than the incoherent, hyperbolic, enigmatic, inconsistent fragments of discourses given to us unauthoritatively as teachings of Jesus.

But I return to my main subject. I have shown what conclusions seem inevitable, so soon as we cease to believe that Jesus is the celestial Prince Messiah of the book of Enoch, popularly expected in his day. To lay stress on his possession of this or that gentle and beautiful virtue is quite away from the purpose. Let it be allowed that Luke has rightly added this and that soft touch to the picture in Matthew and Mark. Let it be granted that the nobler as well as the baser side of the Jerusalem church came direct from Jesus himself. Whether any of the actual virtues of European Christians have been kindled from fires which really burnt in Jesus, it appears to me impossible to know. The heart of Paul gushed with the tenderest and warmest love, and he believed *Christ* to be its source. But the Christ whom he loved to glorify was not the Christ of our books, which did not yet exist; nor a Christ reported to him by the Apostles, to whom he studiously refused to listen; but the Christ whom he made out in the Messianic Psalms, in parts of Isaiah, in the apocryphal book called Wisdom, and perhaps also in the book of Enoch. With such sources of meditation and information open, the personal and bodily existence of Jesus was thought superfluous by a number of Christians considerable enough to earn denunciations in the epistles of John. A great and good man, Theodore Parker, tells me that it would take a Jesus to invent a Jesus. I reply, that, though to invent a Jesus was undoubtedly difficult, to colour a Jesus was very easy. The colouring drawn from a suffering Messiah was superimposed on Jesus by the perpetual meditations of the churches, which, after he had disappeared,

sought the Scriptures diligently, NOT to discover whether Jesus was Messiah, which was already an axiom, BUT to discover *what*, and what sort of a person, Messiah *was*. According as the inquirers studied more in one or in another book, the conception of Messiah came out different; and here we have an obvious explanation of the varieties of portrait in different gospels. The first disciples, who thus by prophetic\* studies supplemented the dry outlines which alone could be communicated by the actual hearers of Jesus, would naturally affix to him many traits not strictly human, nor laudable except on the theory of his superhuman character. Nevertheless, in a church exalted by moral enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, in which the highest spirits were truly devoted to practical holiness, it is to be expected that whatever is most beautiful and tender, pure and good, in the traits of character which in Isaiah or elsewhere were believed to belong to Messiah, would be eagerly appropriated to Jesus, as they evidently were by Paul. Some of these would be likely to tinge often-repeated narratives; so that, although none could invent the outline portrait of Jesus, no difficulty appears in the way of a theory, that the moral sentiment of the church has cast a soft halo over a character perhaps rather stern and ambitious, than discriminating, wise, or tender.

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\* To my personal knowledge, this is the systematic practice of Pauline Christians in the present day. They read of Jesus in the Psalms, in the Prophets, in the "types" of Leviticus, in the Song of Solomon, in the Proverbs,—anywhere, in short,—with more zeal and pleasure than in the three gospels. A free instinct guides them to feed on less stubborn material.

We cannot recover lost history. Into the narratives and discourses of Jesus so much of legendary error has crept that we may write or wrangle about him for ever : Paul is a palpable and positive certainty. . . In what single moral or religious quality Jesus was superior to Paul, I find myself unable to say. Is it really a duty incumbent on each of us to decide such questions? . Why must the task of awarding the palm of spiritual greatness among men be foisted into *religion* ?

It is a fact on the surface of history, that Paul, more than any one else, overthrew ceremonialism. Hereby he founded a religion more expansive than that of Isaiah, and, in his fond belief, expansive as the human race, as the children of God. He was not the first Jew to propound the nullity of ceremonies. If time allowed, that topic might admit instructive amplification. The controversy against ceremonies was inevitable, and, with or without him, must have been fought out. What he effected, let us thankfully record ; but God does not allow us to owe our souls to any one man, as though he were a fountain of life. It is an evil thing to call ourselves a man's followers, to express devotion to him, and blazon forth his name. Every teacher is largely the product of his age : whatever light and truth he imparts, the glory of it is due to the Father of Light alone, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift. Any glory for it would be inexpressibly painful to a *true-hearted* prophet ; I mean, for instance, to one true-hearted as Paul. *He* had no wish to be called Master, Master. *He* could not bear to hear any one say, " I am of Paul." " Who then is Paul, and who Apollos, but ministers by whom ye have believed?" What !

when a man believes himself to be the channel by which it has pleased the Unseen Lord to pour out some portion of hidden truth for the feeding of hungry souls, can such a one bear to be *praised* and *thanked* for his ministrations? Nay, in proportion as he knows himself to speak God's truth by the impulse of God's spirit, in the same proportion he feels his own personality to be annihilated, and he breathes out an intense desire that *God* in him may be glorified, but the *man* be forgotten. I say then, let not us thwart and counteract such yearnings of the simple-hearted instructor. Hear Paul himself further on this matter. "Let no man glory in *men*; for all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours." He means that the collective children of God are the *end*, for whom God has provided teachers as *tools* and *instruments*. But this is not all. In proportion as the teachers are elevated, the taught become unable to judge of their relative rank in honour. Paul therefore forbade the attempt, and deprecated praise. "With me," he continues, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not my own self, but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come; who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of hearts; and then shall every man have (his own) praise of God." What else did he mean to say but: Think not to distribute awards among those to whom you look up. To graduate the claims of equals and inferiors is generally more than a sufficient task. Leave God to pass his awards

on those who are spiritually above you ; who possibly, like Paul, may receive your praise as painful, and be wholly unconcerned at your blame. The glorifying of religious teachers has hitherto never borne any fruit but canonizations and deifications, "voluntary humility and worshipping of messengers," vain competitions and rival sects ; stagnation in the letter, quenching of the Spirit.