CHAPTER 8

We have now reached a stage in this inquiry where a retrospect may be opportune. Expression has been given to difficulties and doubts to which no thoughtful person is a stranger. And these, it has been seen, are rather intensified, than answered or removed, by an appeal to the mere surface current of Scripture testimony. The "Christian argument" from miracles has been shown to be not only inadequate, but faulty. And we have turned to the Acts of the Apostles to find how fallacious is the popular belief that the Jerusalem Church was *Christian.* In fact, it was thoroughly and altogether Jewish. The only difference, indeed, between the position of the disciples during the "Hebraic period" of the Acts and during the period of the Lord's earthly ministry was that the great fact of the Resurrection became the burden of their testimony. And finally we have seen how the rejection of that testimony by the favored nation led to the unfolding of the Divine purpose to deprive the Jew of his vantage-ground of privilege and to usher in the Christian dispensation.

The Divine religion of Judaism in every part of it, both in the spirit and the letter, pointed to the coming of a promised Messiah; and to maintain that a man ceased to be a Jew because he cherished that hope, and accepted the Messiah when He came--this is a position absolutely grotesque in its absurdity. It would not be one whit more monstrous to declare that in our own day a man ceases to be a Christian if and when faith in Christ, from being a mere shibboleth of his creed, becomes a reality in his heart and life.

Twenty years after the Pentecostal Church was formed, the disciples were still regarded by their own nation as a Jewish sect. "The sect of the Nazarenes," Tertullus called them in his arraignment of Paul before Felix; and Paul, in his defense, repudiated the charge claiming that the followers of the Way were the true worshipers of the ancestral God of his nation.[1] Israel fell, not because the disciples, alive to the spiritual significance of their religion, accepted Christ, but because the nation rejected Him and persisted in that rejection, "despising His words and misusing His prophets, till there was no remedy."

It would be an idle and profitless speculation to discuss what would have been the course of the dispensation if the Pentecostal testimony had led the Jews to repentance. What concerns us is the fact that Israel's fall was due to the national rejection of Messiah, and that that fall was "the reconciling of the world" (Rom. 11:15)--a radical change in God's attitude toward men, such as the Old Testament Scriptures gave no indication of, and even the Gospels foreshadowed but vaguely. We thus steer our course unswayed by the ignorance of the Christian skeptic and the animus of the avowed unbeliever. The one, disparaging the Epistles, turns back to the Sermon on the Mount to seek there an ideal Christianity. The other has no difficulty in showing that the teaching of Christ, when so perverted, is the dream of a visionary. The Sermon on the Mount combines principles of limitless scope with precepts designed for the time at which they were spoken, and the

1 Acts 24:5,14. "After the Way, which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers" (see also 28:22), and he goes on to appeal to the law and the prophets. "The Way" came to be the common expression for their teaching (see, *e.g.*, Acts 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22). And speaking before a heathen judge he purposely uses not the Jewish expression, ο θεος των πατέρων ήμων, but the term familiar to the heathen, ο πατρωος θέος, the ancestral or tutelary God.

spiritually intelligent cannot fail to discriminate between the two. It was for such the Bible was written and neither for infidels nor fools.[2]

We conclude, then, as we study the records of the Pentecostal Jewish Church, that the characteristic truths of Christianity have yet to be revealed. Turning back to the earlier Scriptures with the knowledge we now possess, we may find them there in embryo, but the full and formal promulgation of them must be sought in the Epistles. But here the parting of the ways will become still more definitely marked. In passing away from the ministry of "the apostle to the circumcision," we leave behind us, of course, the religion of Christendom--for is not St. Peter its patron saint? Mere Protestantism, moreover, has but little sympathy with studies of this kind. And as for that school of religious thought which seems for the moment to stand highest in the popular favor, we break with it entirely on entering upon the inquiry which lies before us. None such will accompany the truth seeker as he passes on his lonely way.

But while other schools will be simply indifferent to this inquiry, open hostility will be the attitude of those who claim to be the party of progress and enlightenment. It may be well, therefore, to turn aside once again to examine their pretensions. No generous mind would willingly insult a man's religion, whether he be Christian or Jew, Mahometan or Buddhist. But when "religious" men pose as skeptics and critics, they come out into the open and forfeit all "right of sanctuary." Courtesy is due to the religious man who stands behind the *labarum* [ecclesiastical standard] of his creed. Courtesy is no less due to the agnostic who refuses faith in all that lies outside the sphere of sense or demonstration. But what shall be said for those who discard belief in the supernatural while they claim to be the true exponents of a system which has the supernatural as its only basis; or who deprecate belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures while they profess to hold and teach that to which, apart from inspiration in the strictest sense, none but the credulous would listen?

These men pretend to mental superiority; but we only need to tear away the lion's skin they masquerade in to find--exactly what we might expect! Here is a dilemma from which there is no escape. If the New Testament be Divinely inspired, we accept its teaching. We believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that He was born of a virgin, that He died and rose again, that He ascended to heaven and now sits as man at the right hand of God. In a word, we are Christians, and to take any other position is to stultify ourselves by dethroning reason itself. If, on the other hand, the New Testament be not inspired, no consensus of mere human opinion or testimony, however ancient or venerable or widespread, would warrant our accepting figments so essentially incredible. In a word, we are agnostics, and to take any other position is to pose as superstitious fools who would believe anything.

The Christian and the infidel cannot both be right, yet both are entitled to respect, for the one position is logically as unassailable as the other. But what shall be said for the unbelieving Christian, or the Christianized infidel? If he be dishonest, he is almost bad enough for a jail; if he be honest, he is almost weak enough for an asylum. The weak

2 See Appendix, Note IV.

deserve our pity, the wicked our contempt. And their claim to be freethinkers, their affectation of intellectual superiority, give proof that with the majority the more generous alternative is the true one. The old Jewish proverb about straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel well describes their attempt to combine the most fastidious skepticism with the blindest faith. These modern Sadducees talk "as though wisdom were born with them"; whereas, in fact, like their prototypes of old, they are the stupid advocates of an impossible compromise.

Let there be no misunderstanding here. It is not a question of demanding faith on grounds which are either false or inadequate. It is not a question of trading on the superstitious element in human nature, lest common men, in throwing off the restraints of religion, should allow liberty to degenerate into license. This appeal is addressed to the fair-minded, the intelligent, the thoughtful. If we possess a revelation, and if the doctrines of Christianity are Divinely accredited as true, reason commands our acceptance of them, and unbelief is an outrage upon reason itself. If, on the other hand, we have no revelation, or, what comes to the same thing, if the Divine element in Scripture is merely traditional and must be separated from abounding error--picked out like treasure from a dust heap--then we must either give up our Protestantism and fall back on the authority of the Church, or else we must needs face the matter fairly and accept and act upon the dictum that "the rational attitude of the thinking mind towards the supernatural is that of skepticism." The superstitious will take refuge in the former alternative; the latter will commend itself to all free and fearless thinkers. The former, indeed, is not only intellectually deplorable, but logically absurd. We are called upon to believe the Scriptures because the Church accredits them. The Bible is not infallible, but the Church is infallible, and upon the authority of the Church our faith can find a sure foundation.[3] But how do we know that the Church is to be trusted? The ready answer is, We know it upon the authority of the Bible. That is to say, we trust the Bible on the authority of the Church, and we trust the Church on the authority of the Bible! It is a bad case of "the confidence trick."

But, it will be said, is it not to the Church that we owe the Bible?[4] Regarded as a *book*, we owe it indeed in a sense to the Church, just as we owe it to the printer. But in a sense which appeals to us more closely here in England, we owe it to noble men who rescued it for us in defiance of the Church. Let not the Protestants of England forget William Tyndale. His lifework was to bring the Bible within reach even of the humblest peasant. And for no other offense than this the Church hounded him to his death, never resting till it strangled him at the stake and flung his body to the flames.

But the Bible is more than a book--it is a *revelation*; and thus regarded, it is above the Church. We do not judge the Bible by the Church; we judge the Church and its teaching by the Bible.[5] This is our safeguard against the ignorance and tyranny of priestcraft. But

3 This is the position assumed by "Lux Mundi." See specially pp. 340-341.

4 The Old Testament we owe, of course, entirely to the Jews.

5 The Church of England teaches unequivocally that there is neither salvation nor infallibility in the Church, and that the Church's authority in matters of faith is controlled and limited by Holy Writ (see Articles xviii-xxi). And this is Protestantism; not a repudiation of authority in the spiritual sphere, but a revolt against the bondage of mere human authority falsely claiming to be Divine. It delivers us from the authority of "the Church," that we may be free to bow to

in our day those who deprecate most strongly the tyranny of the priest are precisely those who champion most loudly the tyranny of the professor and the pundit. The occupant of a University chair cannot fail to be eminent in the branch of knowledge in which he excels, and his value as a specialist is unquestionable. But he may be so utterly unspiritual and withal so deficient in judgment and common sense, that his opinion may be worth less than that of an intelligent peasant or a Christian schoolboy. The fabric of the Bible, he tells us, is wholly unreliable, but some of its most unbelievable mysteries are truths Divinely revealed. But what claim has he to be listened to in such a case? The setting of the trinket is worthless, and most of its seeming gems are spurious, but here and there he indicates a diamond or a pearl. But the profoundest knowledge of mathematics or Oriental dialects does not qualify a man to judge of pearls and diamonds. Still less does it fit him to recognize spiritual truths.[6]

If the Bible has really been discredited by modern research, let us have the honesty to own the fact and the manliness to face its consequences. But if the Bible has not been thus discredited, if the results of modern research have been entirely in its favor,[7] then let us show a bolder front in our stand for faith. And let faith and unbelief measure their distance once again.

The Bible was written for honest hearts. It is addressed, moreover, to *spiritual* men. And what is the practical test of spirituality? "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37). These words betoken, not the insolence of a priest, but the authority of an inspired apostle. It is as believers then, and in the spirit of faith, that we turn to the Epistles.

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the authority of God. "The Church" claims to mediate between God and man. But Christianity teaches that all pretensions of the kind are both false and profane, and points to our Divine Lord as the only Mediator. Protestantism is not our religion, but it leaves us with a free conscience and an open Bible, face to face with God. It is not an anchorage for faith; but it is like the breakwater which renders our anchorage secure. It shields us from influences which make Christianity impossible.

6 These men declare that to them our faith in Holy Writ seems foolishness. But Holy Writ warns us that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, *for they are foolishness unto him*" (1 Cor. 2:14).

7 To record the points on which the Bible was formerly attacked, marking off those which modern research has disposed of--this is a task which awaits a competent pen. And when the book is written, it will astonish both friends and foes.