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"THE THEOLOGY OF JESUS"

"And one of the scribes came, and asked him, 'Which is the first commandment of all?' And Jesus answered him, 'The first commandment of all is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.'" Mark 12:28-30.

With this passage of scripture for a text it is proposed to institute a brief inquiry into the doctrinal position of Jesus of Nazareth, in so far at least as it can be made out from his own words and acts. Theological discussion is gathering more and more closely every year around the historic Christ. It is believed by many that after all Jesus himself is both the analysis and the test of the religion which He came to establish. The words of Jesus, as distinguished from those of the evangelists and the apostles, are bring subjected to a new scrutiny, and his acts are scanned afresh for any new light which they may throw upon his position as a teacher. To those of us who are his disciples this test should not be unwelcome, though we may be conscious that it is not always made with an unmixed motive and has sometimes led to an underestimate of the apostles and all those portions of the sacred scriptures which are not directly involved; but if the appeal to Jesus himself is invited, to Jesus let us go. If we cannot join with those who wish to construct a new theology on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, we cannot be unwilling to strike the truth at the fountain-head and to receive from him who spake as

never man spake his own views, as far as he was willing to express them, of the religion which he came to establish.

That our Lord was a theological no less than an ethical teacher could go without the saying. In the range of his instruction He certainly covered many of those matters that are usually embraced in theological discussion. His ethical teaching was the outcome of his theological belief. It was precisely because He believed as He did with reference to God and man, and the relations between them, that He taught as He did with reference to human discipline and duty. If his theology had been different He would have presented to the world a different system of ethics.

In considering the theology of Jesus let us notice (1) Its sources, (2) Its wonderful content, and (3) The method of its presentation.

Its Sources.

The scribe who approached our Lord with his question touching the greatest of the commandments was probably not surprised at the action of our Lord in quoting from one of the books of the Old Testament. Jesus had sources of belief. There were grounds upon which He rested his teaching. There were authorities to which He appealed in vindication of his claims. A careful study of his words and acts will show that the sources of his theology were natural, historical and direct. It is evident from some of his allusions that He beheld in created objects, in providence and in the human mind and conscience, the three divisions into which the book of Nature falls, not only some subordinate lessons of truth and duty but the footprints of an originating and directing

power. When He spoke of the sun rising on the evil and on the good, the rain falling on the just and the unjust, when He spoke of day and night, of heat and cold, of moist and dry, of seed-time and harvest, of the clothed grass of the field and the fed birds of the air, it was to intimate that in his belief all these are instinct with a Divine idea. Our Lord may be regarded as brother to all who in the spirit of reverence look "through nature up to nature's God."

But, He recognized a higher source than the book of nature. He responded to the thought that God has spoken to the world by Revelation and Inspiration. He looked upon the canonical scriptures of his countrymen as the oracles of God. In the wilderness He vanquished the devil with quotations from Deuteronomy. Standing up in his own synagogue at Nazareth He read from the Sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. He said reprovngly to the Pharisees, "Ye make void the law of God by your traditions," and to the Sadducees, "Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures." He appealed to Malachi in vindication of John the Baptist, and foretold a part of the destruction of Jerusalem in the language of "Daniel the prophet." His fourth saying on the cross was a piercing sentence from the Twenty-second Psalm, and after his resurrection "beginning from Moses and all the prophets He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." By quotation and reference he covered more than two-thirds of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, and this, in all the divisions of the Old Testament which were common at the time. He referred to the Law and the Prophets, Moses and the Prophets, the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, the Holy Scriptures, the Scriptures. Still further He accepted

those four things which constitute the body and the life of these scriptures, their history, their code of laws, which he recognized as incomplete, their system of sacrifices and prophecy, and their Messianic idea. With reference to the history of the Old Testament He appears to have singled out for special reference most of those well known parts which have made the greatest draft on human credence, the story of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Abel, of Noah and the flood, of Sodom and Domorrah, of Moses and the burning bush, of Elijah and the closed-up heavens, of Jonah and the great fish. He made his appeal to the scriptures. He claimed to expound them, and to live and die, and rise again, according to their teaching. They were part and parcel of his theology. And between the Old Testament and himself stood the mission and ministry of John the Baptist which He endorsed and to which He appealed in vindication of certain of his claims.

And Jesus claimed also to be in direct communication with Heaven. Said he, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of my self, but the Father that swelleth in me He doeth the works." And again, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." While He read with interest in the book of nature and appealed with confidence and assurance to the Old Testament scriptures and the ministry of John the Baptist, He was also in such personal relation to the mind and heart of God the He could claim to be the highest and directest interpreter of the same.

2. Its Wonderful Content.

The sources of his belief being ascertained, we may take up with a better

intelligence an investigation of the belief itself. The questioning scribe must have gathered from both parts of the reply which he received that our Lord entertained a theological belief. In considering this we are at once brought face to face with a content as comprehensive as it is rich and under the circumstances we shall have to be satisfied with only a bare summary of its leading points. The theology of Jesus appears to have gathered around two conceptions, which constituted the staple of his ministry, the kingdom of heaven and the future life; and in his exposition of these He dealt more or less specifically with such subjects as the Divine Being, creation and providence, the kingdom of evil, man and salvation, the church and religious worship, death, resurrection and the judgment, and heaven and hell.

To begin with, Jesus had a Doctrine of God, and as was natural in the case, it determined the genius and the character of his teaching. Our Lord was neither atheistical nor agnostic. He did not deny the being of God and was not in the position of one who could neither affirm nor deny. The words "Lord" and "God" and "Father" were frequently on his lips and his entire ministry was conducted in intelligent and sympathetic recognition of the one to whom they referred. The God of Jesus is a personal rather than an elemental presence. Jesus represented him as possessed of intelligence and will, and full of all efficiency, as capable of moral displeasure, as exerting conscious influence and given to conscious activity, as open to the voice of prayer, and as the one supreme object of worship and service. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman He declared God to be not only personal but spiritual, thus contradicting all pantheistic and materialistic

conceptions of God. When in answer to the scribe Jesus said, "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord," He declared the divine unity, He pronounced against polytheism in all its phases and against every form of worship to which it leads. But with this belief in the Unity of God, our Lord coupled a belief in the divine Tri-unity. He used the expression "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" with a peculiar association and a peculiar emphasis. With him there stood for personal distinctions in the Divine Being. "I will pray the Father and He will send you another comforter that he may abide with you forever, even the spirit of truth." In other connections He represented the Son as possessed of the attributes of eternity and omnipresence, as Lord of the Sabbath, as having power to forgive sin, as worthy of divine honors; and the Holy Spirit as so really divine that a certain form of blasphemy against him was beyond the reach of divine forgiveness. And in the baptismal formula the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were represented by him as possessing equal dignity and equal claims to honor and service. It does not militate against this position that in certain official relations the Son and the Spirit were regarded by our Lord as subordinate to the Father. In this mysterious Being whom Jesus recognized as God He beheld moral as well as natural attributes and made special mention of the divine holiness and goodness. He taught his disciples to say "Hallowed be thy name," and to the courteous young ruler He said "There is none good but one, that is God."

A proof of some of these divine perfections is to be found in those mani-

festations of God which Jesus beheld in Creation and Providence, both of which He proclaimed without reservation. In opposition to materialists in all ages Jesus denied that matter and its accompaniments had always existed. "Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was," "Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." There was a time when the universe was not, a time when it was brought into existence, with the angels of Heaven, of whom Jesus spoke often and always in most beautiful terms, its numberless forms of inanimate nature, and its vast kingdom of sensuous life culminating in man. And against the position that God on his completion of the work of creation withdrew from what He had made, leaving it alone or to carry on itself according to such laws as He had put in it, He himself being related to it only as a distant, self-contented spectator, our Lord inveighed with all the force that He could put into words and acts. Nothing is clearer than that Jesus recognized the superintendency of God over the works of nature. He represented this superintendency as universal and particular. He addressed his Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" and represented him as regulating the sunshine and the rain, as clothing the lilies of the field with a glory more splendid than Solomon's, as holding careful and sympathetic watch over falling sparrows, and as numbering the very hairs of the heads of his children. Everything, thought Jesus, from the highest star that sings its tenor in the music of the spheres to the tiniest form of life that may be found in a disappearing dewdrop, is under the superintendency of God.

Now, with views like these, should it be regarded as a strange thing that Jesus believed in that particular manifestation of providence which is commonly called Miracle? In reply to a certain question which disciples of John the Baptist had brought to him from their master, Jesus said, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." And when asked for a sign in proof of the divine authorization of his mission, He gave unto a faithless and adulterous generation the sign of the prophet Jonah, "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth;" thus unqualifiedly staking his own veracity as teacher, the justice of his claims and the worthiness of his cause, on the fact of his resurrection from the dead; so that if there is nothing in miracle there is nothing in Christ, "our preaching is vain and your faith also is vain." He was himself a miracle.

The celebrated saying of Keats that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" has its untrue side, as all these glittering generalizations are apt to have. There are phases of truth which are far from beautiful and excite quite other than pleasurable sensations: our Lord recognized the kingdom of Evil. He took note of this kingdom in its organization, the spheres of its operation and its destiny. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one," He taught his disciples to pray. And at the head of this kingdom He beheld an evil power denominated by him the wicked one, the prince of

this world, Satan, and the devil; a personality, being represented by our Lord as possessed of intelligence and will, as conscious of moral guiltiness, as capacitated for and actually adjudged to punishment, having certain powers over the souls and bodies of men, and the embodiment of all that our Lord should conceive of as bad. "Ye are of your father the devil," said Jesus to some of his malignant enemies, "and the lusts of your father ye will do; he was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth because there is not truth in him. When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it." While the God of Jesus is holy and righteous and good, Satan or the adversary is the source of all untruth, all temptation to evil, all wickedness and all cruelty. Associated with Satan as his subjects and emissaries are angels or demons steeped in conscious malignity against God, and placed in the same category with the devil himself regarding the punishment of fire. Our Lord was a witness to the reality of demoniacal possessions and He associated them with Satan himself. When the Seventy returned and related with joy how the demons had been subject unto them, Jesus said: "I beheld Satan falling as lightning from Heaven." So Jesus recognized the existense of these foes, organized and malignant, defiant of God, and in their relation to the world, introducing darkness and misery and bent upon the destruction of every soul. Yet our Lord taught that Satan and all his host would eventually be overcome, confined and punished. He spoke of the casting out to the prince of the world and of the "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

In his doctrine of Man Jesus contemplated the creature in nature, in society and in the fall. He recognized in him the climax of the earthly handiwork of God. He acknowledged to him in his natural state moral responsibility, dominion over the lower forms of nature, and immortality. He never spoke one word in disparagement of man in the natural powers of his mind and heart. Not unlikely He looked upon the human intellect with admiration and pride even as He experienced and appreciated the genuine sweetness of human sympathy and love. He took little children into his embrace and said "Of such is the kingdom of Heaven" and his wonderful heart went out in instantaneous affection to the amiable young ruler. He received and reciprocated human friendship and held in good esteem the ordinary amenities of life. The social feature also He recognized. Marriage and the family, neighborhood and the state, were given a conspicuous place in this teaching. Would that the law-makers of our country could lend a reverential ear to what He said on the subject of divorce. Would that all the people could take to heart his instructions concerning the dignity and authority of the political power. With Jesus good citizenship is an essential part of good discipleship. But alas, a dark, dark, shadow forced itself into the Saviour's doctrine of man. Jesus was compelled to behold the race in its fallen estate. In his doctrine of the new birth He taught the appalling depravity of the creature. In other connections He represented him as sick unto death and in danger of perishing forever. "The Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost." "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise

perish." "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

We should not be surprised then that his doctrine of Salvation was in essential respects the exact counterpart of his doctrine of man. In his belief no power under that of God could make adequate provision for the race in such a wretched condition. Hence He preached a salvation whose origin is in God. No salvation in his judgment could do all that needed to be done for man which did not so change man's relation to divine justice as to remove his exposedness to the future wrath, so revolutionize his depraved soul as to bring it back into childship with God, and so elevate the life at last as to give it a place of enjoyment and service in Heaven. He therefore proclaimed a salvation in whose content were to be found full, free and eternal pardon, the regeneration and sanctification of the soul, and the final admission of the soul, together with its risen body, into the realm of the blessed. But salvation as to its method was to be through a mediator, even the Divine Son, himself. "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." This Son, in the ministry of his life on earth, in the ministry of his death and in the ministry of his risen and ascended self, was declared by Jesus to be the mediator between God and man, with all the functions and powers of a Savior. His death so far from being accidental was the supreme purpose of his advent. "And if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me." The sufferings of the Savior were vicarious. "The Son of man is come not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "This is the blood of the New Testament

shed for many for the remission of sins." When our Lord in his conversation with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus said, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?", to what could He have referred but to those passages in Isaiah which set forth the suffering Messiah as wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Our Lord did not die the death of a martyr. Speaking of his own life he said, "I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again." He lived in order that He might die and He died in order that he might expiate the guilt of the world. "O what a melting consideration is this", cried the devout Flavel, "that out of his agony comes our victory, out of his condemnation our justification, out of his crown of thorns our crown of glory!" In the application of this salvation our Lord taught that there are two elements, a divine and a human. "All that my Father hath given me will come to me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "No man cometh unto me except my Father which hath sent me draw him." "Ye must be born again." In these and other passages our Lord taught election, effectual calling, and regeneration. While in passages more numerous He called upon man to repent and believe. Said our Lord, "As Moses lifted up that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Yet, faith must be so practical, and is so utterly worthless without works, that our Lord could say "If thou wouldst enter into life keep the commandments."

Passing over Jesus' relation to the church and religious worship it should

be said that He had a doctrine of Last Things. He spoke of death and of resurrection. "I am the resurrection and the life." were his words to one of the sisters at Bethany. "He that believeth in me though he were dead yet shall he live." "The hour is coming," said He, in another connection, "in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth. They that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." No man can read the 24th chapter of Matthew without seeing that Jesus taught the doctrine of his own coming. On the subject of the general judgment He declared himself with an emphasis that must be felt by all who have made a reverent study of his words. And he taught the doctrine of heaven, the eternal home of the blessed, and of hell, the eternal abode of the lost. The severest utterances on the subject of future punishment fell from the lips of Jesus himself. Jesus who spoke of the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. He spoke of the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. No person was ever so sympathetic as He; no person ever so full of love and grace and tenderness; no person ever so sensitive to moral considerations, no person ever so anxious that all men should be saved; but it was Jesus himself, the Savior of men, who represented the Judge on the throne as saying to those on his left hand "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

THE METHOD OF ITS PRESENTATION.

In the last place let us notice the theology of Jesus in the method of its presentation. From the particular form of his reply to the questioning scribe

and those special phases of the truth which were presented, it must have been noticed that Jesus had his own method of teaching. It was natural to him that he should have a style peculiarly his own. It is certain that he never taught after the method of the schools. He never adopted a theological form. He never drew up articles of faith in logical order after the style of the Westminster Confession or the Catechism of the Council of Trent. Though he had a faith, as has been seen, a faith which he clearly distinguished from all other faiths, and laid on the conscience of his disciples, He deliberately left it to be gathered by careful investigation from his scattered words and acts, as astronomy from the stars, or botany from the plants. As has been seen, he expressed himself upon great theological subjects, emphasizing at times his position upon those particular phases of belief which it has been found difficult for men to accept. It was not put together in any connected scheme, and was delivered as occasions called it forth. We must be impressed by its fragmentariness. "The teaching of the Lord in the Gospels," says Bernard, in tracing the progress of doctrine in the New Testament, "includes the substance of all Christian doctrine. Never was teaching more natural than his. It was drawn forth by occasions as they arose. It shaped itself from the character, the words and the acts of those whom he met in the highway of the world. It borrowed its images from the circumstances and scenery of the moment. Such teaching as this would not seem likely to embrace the whole circle of truth. We should expect to find it partial and fragmentary; full of some points, deficient in

others, according as the occasion for evoking it had or had not arisen," He was a preacher, not a theological professor. The development of his doctrine and the fuller revelation of truth were expressly referred by him to the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the apostles. "I have yet many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when he the spirit of truth is come he shall lead you into all truth." The ministry of the apostles was appointed by him, and by him certified. It was to be a continuation and completion of his own. The superstructure which they should rear upon foundations laid by him would be his. The Savior referred as occasion suggested, to the higher nature of the Son of God; but it was left for the apostle John to develop the splendid doctrine of the Divine Logos. When He has said "This is my blood of the new testament shed for many for the remission of sins." the author of the letter to the Hebrews was justified in elaborating the doctrine of Christ's eternal priesthood. The letter to the Galatians is an enlargement of his idea of the dignity and privilege of the children of God, while that to the Ephesians setting forth union of Jews and Gentiles in the blessings of the gospel is only an expansion of his great commission: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. After He had said, "That whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have eternal life" the great apostle to the Gentiles would develop the magnificent doctrine of justification by faith, the day star of freedom for every generation since.

The purpose of Jesus in his teachings was not only to state the truth,

but to reach the people with the truth. He was indeed no caterer to popular weakness, but with him it was all important for the common heart and mind to be reached. The dominating idea in Millet's Angelus is not in the form and dress of the peasant couple that stand in the foreground, nor the beautiful tranquility that seems to rest upon the village in the distance from whose towers the vesper bells are ringing, nor in the mysterious gold of the sunset which the artist has tempered and diffused with so marvellous a genius. It is in the suggested spiritual exercise that is going on the soul of those who appear in the scene. The highest of thoughts descends and makes its residence in the humblest of hearts. Our Lord looked upon it as a part of his mission to bring the thoughts of God and the hearts of the people together. Accordingly his method of instruction was characterized by a most beautiful simplicity. In the phases of truth presented, as well as in the form of expression employed, he was a Master indeed. The common people heard him gladly. The woman at the well was no less at home with Him when he talked with her about the spirituality of God than was the intelligent Nicodemus when the Master discoursed to him in private on the subject of the birth from above. Our Lord lost no thought in rhetoric. He was never labored nor artificial. He cared nothing for superficial effect. This enthusiasm for simplicity, which was one of his characteristics, probably had as much as anything else to do with forming his habit of stating the inherently mysterious without discussion, and leaving paradoxical truth to take care

of itself. He entered into no discussion on the subject of the Trinity. He simply declared that God is one and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are God. How sovereign election and human free will come together in the salvation of a soul, or how regeneration and faith are associated in a soul's entrance into the Kingdom of God. He did not discuss. The paradox of the ages He never sought to remove. He taught election, free will, and regeneration, and called upon men every where to repent and believe. It was as though He had said to the people, If you were able to behold all Truth in the perspective every phase of contradiction would disappear, for truth is harmonious in all its parts.

It must be said in conclusion that Jesus in the unfolding of his theological belief was always and intensely practical. He was not a proclaimer of truth in the abstract. Truth to be of value to men must be operative. It was not out of any love for they that our Lord taught as He did. Every part of his theology was deemed capable of being converted into convictions, into experience, and into life. He declared the doctrines of God that He might enforce the commandments of God. He proclaimed the purposes of God that He might support the promises of God. Back of God's promise are His purposes, and back of His commandments are His doctrines of truth. The salvation and enlightenment of men, their subordination to the will of God, and their equipment for worship and service were the ends which Jesus sought in His teaching. He said to the inquiring scribe "the Lord our God is one Lord because he was proceeding to say,"And

thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." To the woman at the well He said "God is a Spirit, in order that he might divert her mind from Gerizim and Jerusalem, as a central place of worship and teach her that in the new dispensation every spot of earth can be made an altar of the Most High, and is therefore to be regarded on holy ground. It was upon the perfection of God in the attribute of mercy that He commanded the Disciples to love their enemies. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for He maketh his sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good and sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful. And when finally, just before his ascension, He announced afresh to his disciples that mediatorial authority which He had derived from God, and his ability to be with them even unto the end of the world, it was only a divine whereas to the greatest and sublimest of all commissions, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This commission is large, because of the theological conceptions that are in it. God is the God of all the earth. Jesus Christ is the Mediator between himself and men. The gospel to be proclaimed is His power

unto the salvation of all who believe. Sin is in the world working ruin and death, but a salvation has been provided sufficient for all, efficient for those who accept it. Set the work of executive, the commission, called by the Duke of Wellington the marching orders of the Christian ministry, go on. Set the gospel continue in its course until every wind and wave shall murmur songs of redemption and the light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.