

# THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS OF MORAL THEOLOGY

By

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It is only possible within the compass of a paper of this dimension to give an introduction to so large a subject as 'The New Testament Basis of Moral Theology.' Perhaps the best way to approach this introduction will be by means of a series of three propositions.

### I

*Any discussion of the subject must begin by taking seriously the first commandment.* This commandment does not begin with the words 'Thou shalt not' do this, that or the other, but with the words: 'I am the Lord thy God ... Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.' It is only too obvious that many books on Christian ethics start from the imperatives of conscience or from theories of values. The Judaic-Christian tradition starts from the divine 'I am.' God is Lord, and He only is to be served. Until there is a return to Biblical theo-centricity here, we shall continue to flounder ethically. It is not without profound significance theologically that the old Hebrews conjugated their verbs 'He, thou, I.' The damnation of modern society is that it seeks to run its life as it conjugates its verbs—'I, thou, He.' That is idolatry: the putting of self first and of God (if, indeed, there be time left over for Him) last.

To seek to produce Christian ethics apart from the first commandment, character apart from religion, is like trying to produce roses from a tree whose roots have been cut, or to rear a noble building when the foundations have been neglected or undermined. You cannot expect results *from* nothing. Christian ethics just do not happen, or at least do not continue to exist for long, when they are divorced from Christianity. The last six of the ten commandments follow, or, rather, proceed from the first four. If you seek a monument—a terrible monument—of the catastrophe that

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follows neglect of the first four commandments, look around you on the chaos of a world organized with God left out, the chaos which God planned as a cosmos. To invert the order of

the ten commandments is to invite disaster. Only when men worship and serve God can they be right with their fellows.

Luther, in his Shorter Catechism, gives expression to this truth when he begins the explanation of every commandment with the words: 'We ought thus to fear and love God in order that we ...' Ethics are thus, to use a phrase of Emil Brunner, 'placed within the sphere of dogmatics.'<sup>1</sup> Exodus xx is more concerned with man and God than with man and man. It affirms that if the first relationship is sound, the second will be also. It is because they are members of a community which belongs to God that those who hear the Decalogue must behave in a certain way towards one another. So it is in the teaching of our Lord. Membership in the family of the Father determines the kind of conduct to be expected from His sons to one another, and then, in a broader field, to those who should be His sons, that is, to all the world. 'The only conduct that has value to God is conduct animated by the adoring obedience of children to their father.'<sup>2</sup> Yes, truly, Christian ethics are based on the priority given by the Biblical writers to the worship of Almighty God.

## II

*Any discussion of the subject must take seriously the New Testament concept of faith.* His biographer tells of a visit which Bishop Westcott paid to his old schoolmaster, Bishop Prince Lee. 'People quote various words of the Lord as containing the sum of the Gospel—the Lord's Prayer, the Sermon on the Mount, and the like,' said the senior man to his distinguished junior. 'To me the essence of the Gospel is in simpler and shorter terms: μή φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευε. Ah! Westcott, mark that μόνον. ('Fear not; only believe ... mark that "only".')<sup>3</sup> It was good advice. Here, in the word 'faith' we

<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Imperative*, p. 85

<sup>2</sup> W. F. I. ofthousc, *A Companion to the Bible*, edited by T. W. Manson. p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, I. p. 249.

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are at grips with one of the greatest concepts of the New Testament—*fides heroica et mirifica*. Some understanding of it is basic to any approach to the subject of Christian ethics.

Adolf Deissmann, in his *The Religion of Jesus and the Faith of Paul*,<sup>4</sup> draws a distinction between what he calls acting mysticism and re-acting mysticism. In the former, the mystic regards his communion with God as his own action, from which a reaction follows on the part of the Deity. That is acting mysticism. But re-acting mysticism is of a different order. Here the mystic regards his communion with God as an experience in which the action of God upon him produces a reaction towards God. The distinction is, I think, a valid one. The latter type of mysticism is, surely, a dominant New Testament concept. 'We love,' says St. John, 'because He first loved us.'<sup>5</sup> What is true in the Johannine writings is abundantly true in the Pauline. If the love of God and the grace of God may be represented in Pauline thought by an arrow pointing downwards, faith may be represented by an arrow pointing upwards. The divine initiative elicits and meets the response of faith. Where initiative and response meet, at that point there takes place 'a new creation,' and a man becomes 'in Christ.' At that point, a new principle (if so we may translate νόμος ['law'] in Romans viii, 2) becomes operative. The powers of the New Age begin to do their mighty work in the life of the regenerate man. 'Faith,' says Thomas Chalmers, 'is the starting point of obedience,' 'not more the harbinger

of peace in a sinner's heart than it is the sure and unfailing germ of his progressive holiness.' That last phrase is noteworthy. In the light of it, Chalmers can write: 'To work legally is to work *for* life, to work evangelically is to work *from* life.'<sup>6</sup> How dominant is that distinction in the thinking of Martin Luther anyone will recognize who has worked through his great commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians. 'It is not good works,' he writes, 'which produce a good man, but a good man who produces good works.' Put that in the jargon—meaningful jargon, nevertheless!—of modern theology, and we have the insistence that *kerygma* precedes *didache*, indeed that *didache* is the outcrop of *kerygma*. That is to say, Christian ethics are response ethics, grateful penitence,

<sup>4</sup> pp. 193 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John iv, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from an article by G. D. Henderson in *Theology Today*, Oct. 1947. (Vol. IV. No. 3, pp. 354 and 355.)

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thankful reaction to the Creator-Redeemer God. Christian ethics do not produce Christian life. No: but 'the Christian experience provides sufficient motive for the Christian life.'<sup>7</sup> The reason why the Church of England, by the middle of the eighteenth century, had become little more than an ethical society, powerless to contain the dynamic force of Christianity as revealed in the New Testament, was that it taught that man could live by ethics. He cannot. He can only regulate his life by ethics. He cannot renew that life in himself nor infuse it into others. He can no more live by ethics than he can increase his stature by taking thought.

Hence the futility of preaching Christian ethics to the man who knows nothing of the vivifying, energizing power of faith. 'Righteousness is God's demand *because it is God's gift*.' So writes Dr. J. S. Whale.<sup>8</sup> That is of the very essence of the doctrine of grace. Who are the 'truly happy,' according to the teaching of the Master? They are 'the poor in spirit,' that is to say, those who are conscious of their spiritual need. They are 'the meek,' that is to say, those who make no claim, but cast themselves on the mercy of God. They are 'those who hunger and thirst after God's salvation' (for that may be the significance of 'righteousness' in St. Matthew v, 6, rather than 'moral goodness').<sup>9</sup> To such, to the 'little flock' of the New Israel, is the kingdom given—and the verb is noteworthy (Luke xii, 32). It is when the two debtors both find themselves with empty hands that they are in a position to be frankly forgiven (Luke vii, 42). It is because the elder brother has so much in his hand to bring, while the younger has nothing, that the one finds himself outside the Father's house at the end of the singularly solemn story of Luke xv, 11 ff., while the other is within the warmth of the family fellowship. To prattle about one's dues is to reckon in a currency wholly foreign to that of the Father, who alone understands the currency of love and grace. Browning, of course, was right:

'We cannot  
Make out, and reckon on, His ways  
And bargain for His love, and stand,  
Paying a price, at His right hand.'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> C. Anderson Scott: *St. Paul the Man and the Teacher*, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> *Christian Doctrine*, p. 78 (italics mine).

<sup>9</sup> See A. M. Hunter, *The Unity of the New Testament*, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> *Johannes Agricola.*

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It follows, then, that to go to one who is not a man of faith, to a man in whom the powers of the Age to Come are not operative, and to say to him, ‘Do your best to live by the Sermon on the Mount,’ is to mock him in his dire need. It is to shout out good advice, instead of to throw out a rope, to a man who is drowning. The law which came from the Galilean hill is far more shattering than the law which came from Sinai’s mountain. The Sermon on the Mount was spoken to the Church, not to the world.<sup>11</sup> To attempt to patch the tattered garments of the world with it may make the rents worse. The Sermon on the Mount can do for the modern only what the ancient law did for Saul of Tarsus, make him conscious of his sinnership and of his unholiness. If it makes him cry out in agony ‘Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?’ it will have fulfilled its function and made way for the operation of grace. H. G. Wells was quite right when he wrote: ‘The truth is that the Galilean has been too great for our small hearts.’ Exactly: there is need for the grace of God and the gift of the Spirit shed abroad to re-make and enlarge those hearts which sin has shrivelled.

Luther, as usual, puts this clearly. He is commenting on Galatians iv, 8, 9, and writes: ‘This law “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, etc.” requireth a perfect obedience, a perfect fear, trust and love towards God. These things men neither do nor can perform in this corrupt nature. Therefore this law ... justifieth not, but accuseth and condemneth.’ Or, to put it another way, and to turn from Germany to Scotland, we may note the words of a seventeenth century work, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*: ‘Both these laws (of Moses and of Christ) agree in saying, “Do this.” But there is this difference. The one says, “Do this and live.” The other says, “Live and do this.” The one says, “Do this for life.” The other says, “Do this from life.”’ In those two prepositions lies the very germ of the theology of Christian ethics. It brings us to the heart of the doctrines of grace and of faith. *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*, says Augustine,<sup>12</sup> underlining in his own succinct way the whole theme of the priority of grace to works, and hinting in that great imperative ‘*da*’ at the whole doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of the Church.

<sup>11</sup> See C. Gore, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 15 (‘spoken into the ear of the Church and overheard by the world,’ comparing v, 1, with vii, 28).

<sup>12</sup> *Confessions*, Book X. xxix, 40; xxx, 45; xxxvii, 60.

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### III

*Any discussion of the subject must take seriously the New Testament doctrine of love.* To state that in *agape* the New Testament sees the *fons et origo* of all ethical conduct is to make a statement so obvious as to need no elaboration. A glance at a concordance is sufficient to demonstrate this. But the modern thinker tends to get a warped idea of *agape* for two reasons: *First*, because he often thinks of it as a human virtue. *Secondly*, because he thinks of it too much on the emotional plane. A word must be said about both these points.

*First*: It is a very suggestive fact that St. Paul only very rarely indeed—and then in passages which may be quotations<sup>13</sup>—speaks of man’s love for God. *Agape* to him is predominantly the love of God for man (faith is man’s response). It is God’s gracious character manifesting itself

in redeeming activity. He links this very closely with his doctrine of the Holy Spirit—‘the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost given to us’ (Romans v, 5). This doctrine is for Paul the outcome of his own experience. He recognizes that new powers are at work in him of which in his pre-conversion days he knew nothing. He can only ascribe this to the love of God, overflowing the old aridity and making him fruitful in all good works. It is not *he*, but *God*.

*Secondly:* New Testament *agape* moves far more in the realm of the *volitional* than of the *emotional*. Bishop Stephen Neill has defined it as ‘the steady directing of the human will towards the eternal well-being of another.’ Loving on the Christian plane and liking on the human may be two different things. In this connection, we may note the standards which Paul sets for his readers in Asia Minor. They are indicated by the repetition of *καθὼς και ὁ θεός* (Eph. iv, 32) and *καθὼς και ὁ χριστός* (Eph. v, 2 and 25). How is a man to forgive? Even as God in Christ forgave. How is he to walk in love? Even as Christ loved us and handed Himself over for us sacrificially. How is he to love his wife? Even as Christ loved

<sup>13</sup> Viz. Romans viii, 28 : ‘We know that ...’ may be the apostle’s way of introducing a well-known saying, cf., verse 22, and 1 Corinthians viii, 1, etc. There is, too, an alternative possibility of translating: ‘We know that with those who love, God co-operates in all things good.’ Even if, on this rare occasion, St. Paul does speak of man’s love for God, he goes on immediately to refer to *God’s* call of him. I Corinthians ii, 9, is a quotation. But note 1 Corinthians viii, 3.

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the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf. That is to say, the measure of our conduct is the measure of the divine *agape*. It is not a question of natural liking, but of divine loving worked out on the plane of everyday relationships and conduct. ‘*Agape*,’ says C. H. Dodd,<sup>14</sup> ‘is not warm feeling, but an energy of goodwill, inexhaustible, unlimited by the worthiness or unworthiness of its objects, and going to the utmost lengths of self-sacrifice on their behalf.’

Perhaps these three considerations—the primacy of the first commandment and the doctrines of faith and of love—may serve as a background against which to set the rest of what we have to say about ethics of the New Testament. The same epistle which thrills most gloriously to the doctrine of grace insists most specifically on the details of consistent ethical conduct. Does it seem somewhat banal, after writing: ‘By grace ye are saved through faith,’ to enjoin the same readers: ‘Let the thief steal no more’ (Eph. ii, 8, and iv, 28); after giving the loftiest teaching in the New Testament on the Church, to make the colour rise in the readers’ cheeks by warning them against uncleanness and sexual immorality? But such is the consistent emphasis of the New Testament, and it goes back to the most primitive days of the history of the Christian Church. The fact that what is one of the earliest sources of our Synoptic Gospels, Q, is given over almost entirely to what we may call *didache* (with only the faint outline of a story discernible within it) shows that the early Church had a very lively interest in the *ethics* of the Christian faith. They did *not* feel that, in the light of the mighty acts of God with which the *kerygma* dealt, they could afford to sit loose to the specific details of conduct, as necessarily following from an acceptance of the *kerygma*. No: *didache* must be given and in some considerable detail.

It is at this point that we find (if I may use an over-worked but none the less valuable word) a *tension*. *On the one hand*, there is about the ethics of the New Testament an element of *spontaneity* which is wholly delightful. What more spontaneous description could Paul use of

the growth of the Christian character which he describes in Galatians v, 22, than the word ‘fruit’ (not, be it remarked in passing, ‘fruits,’ as it is so often misquoted, but ‘fruit,’ the use of the singular pointing to the unity of character which the

<sup>14</sup> *The Gospel and the Law of Christ*, p. 7.

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Spirit creates)? On this word, D. M. Ross comments, ‘true goodness has the character of inevitableness, that it cannot but spring forth.’<sup>15</sup> And Luther: ‘From the point of view of faith, we may not ask whether we ought to do good works, for they do themselves without asking.’ It is to be expected that when the love of God flows into a man, there should ripen the fruit which Paul in this famous passage describes. The parallel phrase which occurs in the best readings in Ephesians v, 9—‘the fruit of the *light*’—is again ‘spontaneous’ in emphasis, and speaks to us of the luscious fruit which a tree in a natural, healthy, light position may be expected to produce. Surely Augustine was thinking of this element when he wrote that dangerously true dictum: ‘Love, and do as you like,’ for when a man knows what God means by love, he will increasingly ‘like’ to do what God wills to be done. His will will be one with the God’s who is love, ‘to do and to endure.’

*On the other hand*, there is a strong element in the ethical vocabulary of the New Testament which has about it the tang of sweat and toil. It is true that one of the favourite verbs of Paul is the verb ἐνεργεῖν (see, for example, 1 Cor. xii, 6, 11; Gal. ii, 8; iii, 5; v, 6; Eph. i, 11, 20; iii, 20; Phil. ii, 13, etc.). This verb gives splendid expression to the energizing power of the Spirit in the members of Christ’s Church; in them there operates that very power which raised Christ from the dead. Indeed, it would be hard to find a phrase which better summarizes the emphasis so far made in this paper than the phrase which occurs in Galatians v, 6: πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη. Or again in Philippians ii, 13: ‘God is the One who works in you (ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν) both to will and to work ...’ But this last statement follows immediately upon a command—‘with fear and trembling τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε work ... at your salvation’ (Moffatt), ‘labour earnestly ... to make sure of your salvation’ (Weymouth), ‘make every effort to obtain salvation’ (Grimm-Thayer).<sup>16</sup> (In this connection, we may ask whether σωτηρία here should not be translated ‘full spiritual health,’ rather as, in Philippians i, 19, the word clearly means ‘well-being,’ as also in the papyri.)<sup>17</sup> Here, then, in close juxtaposition are the two emphases of a God who ‘energizes’ and of His servant who toils mightily at the achievement of full spiritual life.

<sup>15</sup> *The Spiritual Genius of St. Paul*, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, sub κατεργάζομαι

<sup>17</sup> For refs. see H. G. Meecham, *Light from Ancient Letters*, p. 62.

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We may turn to another New Testament passage where this double emphasis is given with no attempt at relieving the tension —2 Peter i, 3-7. Verse 4 is parenthetical, but none the less important for that. It emphasizes the note of ‘givenness’ which is sounded in verse 3. The words influenced John Wesley greatly in his spiritual crisis in 1738. He read the words on the morning of May 24, and that very day found relief for his soul. A few days later he wrote in his diary: ‘I saw, more than ever, that the Gospel is in truth but one great promise, from the

beginning of it to the end.’ But that note of ‘givenness’ (‘His divine power has bestowed on us every requisite for life and piety ...’) is followed by an injunction to strenuous toil—‘for this very reason, do you continue to make it your whole concern to furnish your faith with . . . ,’<sup>18</sup> and then there follows a list of seven *desiderata*. The basis of this septet is faith; but the writer is not content to leave undefined the outcrop which should spring from it. On the contrary, he feels he must be specific and clear in stating the kind of character of which a man of faith must be the possessor. The list which begins with *faith* reaches its climax in love, the two basic concepts in Christian ethics of which we have already taken note. Careful attention should be paid to the intervening words. With some of them we are familiar from other similar lists (e.g. Gal. v, 22, ff; 2 Cor. vi, 4, ff; 1 Tim. vi, 11; Rev. ii, 19, etc.).

The first word, ἀρετή is a muscular one. *Strenuus animae tonus et vigor*, says Bengel, with characteristic pointedness. J. B. Mayor translates the word as ‘moral energy,’ and compares 1 Peter i, 13, ‘girding up the loins of your mind.’ Moffatt writes of it as ‘resolution; moral and mental energy.’ Here is no fool, undisciplined in habit and mind. Here is a man whose moral and mental muscles are taut and ready for action. That the next word is γνώσις only serves to underline the fact that there is a moral obligation upon the Christian to be intelligent! If the spirit of his mind is constantly being renewed (Eph. iv, 23), γνώσις will constantly be added to his spiritual equipment, the power of spiritual discernment will flourish and abound.

The next two words are familiar to the student of the New-Testament—self-control (ἐγκράτεια) in all areas of life, mastery of one’s appetites in the broadest sense of that term, and *endurance*

<sup>18</sup> The rendering is that of Moffatt.

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(ὑπομονή), a dogged steadfastness which will not give up, however strong the opposition may be, a tenacity such as characterized the Christ (cf. 2 Thess. iii, 5). The last two words before the climactic *agape* are godliness (εὐσέβεια) and brotherliness (φιλαδελφία), the order and juxtaposition of the two words being at least suggestive in view of what was said at the beginning of this lecture on ethics as *proceeding from* a man’s relationship with God. The word εὐσέβεια is in the New Testament almost confined to the Pastoral Epistles (except for 2 Peter). The writer is concerned that his readers should show such a kind of religious quality of life as would mark them off from those of other religions who surrounded them. So 2 Peter envisages men living in such relation with God (εὐσέβεια) and with one another (φιλαδελφία) that their quality of life will be manifest for all to see. To this end, they are ‘especially bound to use every effort’ (verse 5).

Here, then, is the tension with which the New Testament is shot through, on the one hand the ‘givenness,’ the ‘spontaneity’ of divine energizing grace, on the other hand the never-ceasing toil of the accomplishment of σωτηρία, full spiritual vitality, what St. John calls, simply, ‘life.’ Paradox? Yes. But the Christian theologian is not daunted by that word, for he has learned to think in terms of *both—and*, and not only of *either—or*. *Both God and Man, both spirit and body, both temporal and eternal*, and—in the sphere of our present study—*both the givenness of divine grace and the labour and diligence by which we make our calling and election sure*. From the ‘polarity’ of these two concepts is derived the nervous vitality of the Christian life.

Earlier in this paper, I alluded briefly to the fact that the contents of the document which we call Q show that the Apostolic Church paid primary attention to the moral requirements of the faith. The unknown compiler of that invaluable document might have raised his Semitic eyebrows in surprise at the forthrightness of the modern American writer who said 'Ethics is nothing but doctrine gone off on an errand. The Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer in overalls,'<sup>19</sup> but he would nevertheless have been in substantial agreement with him. But Q is only one witness to the stubborn insistence of the early Church on the primacy of ethics. Two recent writers have, by their researches, done much to

<sup>19</sup> Paul Scherer, *For We Have This Treasure*, p. 166.

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emphasize this fact, not so much from a study of Q as from an analysis of primitive ethical codes which they think are discernible behind our early Christian documents. The writers to whom I refer are Archbishop Philip Carrington, of Quebec, and Dr. E. G. Selwyn, Dean of Winchester. The latter in his great commentary on 1 Peter (a worthy volume to succeed Lightfoot, Armitage Robinson and others in the same great series)<sup>20</sup> constantly acknowledges his indebtedness to Archbishop Carrington's *The Primitive Catechism*.<sup>21</sup> Dr. Selwyn's researches lead him to support Dr. Carrington's conclusion that the *Haustafeln* which appear in several Epistles go back to one source which is prior to the Epistles. This pushes the ethical teaching back to a very early date, and is deeply significant. The arguments behind these views are probably familiar to many readers; some of the main outcomes of the researches of these two scholars may be briefly mentioned. From a study of certain Epistles taken in conjunction with the decrees of Acts xv. 29, a common catechetical pattern may be discovered, with characteristic key words such as 'to abstain from' (ἀπέχεσθαι), 'lusts' (ἐπιθυμίαι), 'holy' (ἅγιος, and its cognates ἁγιασμός and ἁγνίζειν), and 'love' (ἀγάπη) or 'brotherly-kindness' (φιλαδελφία).

Here we may discern the nucleus of a baptismal catechism designed for the *Filii Lucis*, the φωτισθέντες (cf. Heb. vi, 4, where the latter expression—'those who were enlightened'—seems to be used almost technically of those baptized into the Christian community, with the constantly recurring 'light and darkness' theme of such passages as 1 Thess. v, 1-6; 1 Peter ii, 9. etc.; Phil. ii, 15; Col. i, 13; Eph. v, 8, 14, etc.; which, in turn, seem to be clearly based on certain *verba Christi* such as Matt. v, 14; Luke xvi, 8; John viii, 12: xii, 36, etc.). Again the recurring theme of ἀποθέσθαι and ἐνδύσασθαι, of *Deponentes* and *Induentes*, seems clearly baptismal and may well be very early. A study of the tables of comparative passages which Dr. Selwyn gives with such profusion in his commentary is very interesting and profitable. It suggests that if, as a result of taking seriously such a book as C. H. Dodd's *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, we can trace a very early common outline of the primitive *kerygma*, the result of the work of Carrington and Selwyn is to show that the early Church

<sup>20</sup> Macmillan, 1946.

<sup>21</sup> Cambridge, 1940.

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gave equally serious attention to the ethical demands of the faith. That is to say, *kerygma* and *didache* developed side by side; the development of both originated very early in the life of



the Christian Church. If one of the first questions of the Church was ‘What shall we *preach* as we go about our evangelistic task?’ not much later came the question ‘What shall we *teach* as we prepare for baptism those whom we have evangelized?’ To the urgency of this latter question both Q and the *Haustafeln* bear witness. Pretty specific definition had early to be given to such a general idea as being ‘sons of God,’ or being ‘led by the Spirit of God.’

One final word must be said. Several times in the course of this paper the adjective ‘specific’ has been used of the ethical passages of the New Testament. St. Paul, for example, is not content to leave *agape* undescribed. He elaborates its outworking in the Christian life and character as the very reverse of that ‘rapacity’ (πλεονεξία) which marks the unregenerate life. That is true, and to it all the main strata of the New Testament bear witness (cf. our Lord’s teaching about the kind of person you are to invite to your dinner party, or St. John’s remarks about the man who says he loves and yet shuts up his compassion from his brother). And yet—how far does the New Testament keep from attempting to legislate! How remote in tone and atmosphere is St. Paul from Cyprian! True, St. Paul refers once to ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. vi, 2), but one suspects that was done semi-humorously. For it comes in an Epistle where humour and passion alternate strangely, and where the sound of his voice and the light in his eye would help us in our problems of exegesis not a little! Of all the Pauline Epistles, to write in *Galatians* of the ‘law of Christ’! For the letter is largely dedicated to the task of proving that the man in Christ is outside the sphere of νόμος. And the phrase did not ‘take on’ very extensively in the immediately post-Apostolic age.<sup>22</sup> But one suspects that, for all the possibility of humour in the use of the phrase, there was a deadly seriousness in the mind of the Apostle as he penned it. The Christian man is free for ever from all that the Jew understood by νόμος, codes of commandments contained in ordinances. But when he comes under the influence of the love of Christ, he finds himself to be the slave of that Master: indeed, he is enslaved to Him and to the demands of His love. In that new

<sup>22</sup> See T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp.293-4.

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sphere he finds his freedom. He does not find, what the immature in him sometimes cries out for, *directions* about this and that. On the contrary, he finds *direction*, the direction of the law of Christ which is love, the outworking of which calls for all the enlightenment of a renewed mind and the energy of a regenerate will. As he walks that path, he begins to discover what the Master meant when He claimed to have come to fulfil the Law, and what St. Paul meant when he said that love is the πλήρωμα, the total content, of the Law. He, from his position within the Kingdom, can understand that the Reign of God does not consist in detailed directions about eating and drinking, but rather in ‘righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ (Rom. xiv, 17). God is prepared to treat him, if he is prepared to be treated, as an adult, not as a babe subject to the minutiae of petty regulations. The ‘little children’ of Galatians iv, 19 must become mature if the plan of God for them is to be fulfilled. This will come to pass only as they exercise the responsibility of a vigorous mind in working out in the concrete situations of a complex modern world-order the implication of the Royal Law. From that responsibility there can be no withdrawal, least of all into a new, albeit Christianized, legalism. Such withdrawal is a refusal to face the demand of the Christ that we should in Him become full *persons*—and from that demand there can be no retreat if the springs of life are to keep flowing up into us.

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