

[The Presbyterian, June 24, 1926]

## **Paul a Modernist!**

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It is somewhat amusing as well as startling and astonishing to find modernists claiming Paul as one of their number. The modernist denies almost everything Paul taught. The claim cannot find basis in any identity of modernism with the Pauline theology.

Paul taught the pre-existence of Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, which the evolutionary modernist, if he is consistent, must relegate to the scrap-heap. There is no logical halting place between a thorough-going evolution and Unitarianism. However, some men are happily inconsistent, or illogical, or never carry out their premises to their inevitable conclusions; and this saves the faces of some. But modernism which is the product of evolution grows into Unitarianism as naturally and as surely as an acorn grows into an oak.

If Christ was but a superman, an evolutionary “sport” *per saltum*, the climax of cosmical development, then the doctrine of the Trinity evidently goes by the board. If Jesus Christ was born of human parents, the natural offspring of the human stock, with no intervention of supernatural power or conjunction of divine essence, what becomes of the doctrines of his pre-existence and therefore of the doctrine of the Trinity? Some evolutionists may seek to parry this by recourse to the doctrine of divine immanence in the process and product of cosmical change. But divine immanence in place of heredity, natural selection, or resident forces, is not a recognized doctrine of evolution. It virtually means creation, which the evolutionists is prone to avoid. And divine immanence in the evolution of the world, climaxing in the superman Jesus Christ, is not the incarnation of the Logos in the Scriptural sense. The distinction of trinal personality, the distinction of the Son in the Godhead, is obscured. The pre-existence of Christ fades away, and the doctrine of the Trinity is lost. The denial of the virgin birth and of Christ's pre-existence disposes of the whole doctrine of the incarnation in any Biblical sense. This is the inevitable and the actual result. Who ever heard a modernist stress the doctrine of the Trinity? Who ever hear a modernist stress the personality of the Holy Spirit? When Christ becomes to us an evolution from the human stock, the Holy Spirit becomes only an influence, and the result is Unitarianism. How much this differs from Paul needs no elaboration.

Paul taught a verbal inspiration. “Which things we speak not in the *words* which man's wisdom teacheth; (1 Cor. 2:13). “When ye received the *word* of God which ye *heard* of us, ye received it not as the *word* of man, but as it is in the truth, the *word* of God.” (I Thess. 2:13). “The things that I write unto

you are the commandments of the Lord” (I Cor. 14:17). How far is this from the modernistic conception of the Scriptures!

Paul taught a vicarious atonement, which is the special object of the modernist's hatred, and which one of them belonging to the Presbyterian contingent recently characterized as “artificial and immoral.” But Paul thought and taught very differently. “he was made sin *for* us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Cor. 5:21). “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse *for* us” (Gal. 3:13). “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28). No sort of manipulation short of destroying the text can take the vicarious atonement from the writings of Paul or, we may add, from the Scriptures as a whole.

Justification by faith on the ground of Christ's imputed righteousness is another of Paul's doctrines over which the modernist stumbles. The modernist prefers to lean on the broken reed of his own good works and character, inadequate and insufficient by all the distance and difference between man's sin and God's holiness. Paul saw more truly: “Not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:9). “By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,” (Gal. 2:16).

Paul's belief in the resurrection of Christ and in the resurrection of the body is too evident to require textual citation. The modernist takes issue with both these features of Pauline eschatology. Paul's belief and the modernist's denial are to each other as zenith to nadir. It would require more than Hegel's genius to find a thesis which would bring antitheta into harmonious synthesis. And yet by some strange legerdemain the modernists claim Paul.

It is a weakness of human nature to claim approval everywhere, even where it does not exist, and probably the modernist is not proof against the common tendency. But the reason assigned for such a claim is Paul's transition from Judaism to Christianity. That Paul found in Christ the fulfillment of Old Testament types, the fruit that had ripened from the seed long planted, is assumed by the modernist to be a valid reason why he may excise at pleasure all the vital doctrines of Christianity. Who gave the modernist this authority? Wherein is the logical parallel between the relation of Judaism to Christianity and the relation of Christianity to modernism? If Christ is the antitype of the Old Testament sacrifices, is modernism the antitype of Christianity to supersede and displace it? Does it appear that modernism is a fulfillment of New Testament potentialities, or on the other hand, a denial of its plain statements and its historical facts? With what show of reason can the modernist claim Paul while he denies and repudiates the things for which Paul stood?

Dr. Francis L. Patton, in his “Fundamental Christianity,” has answered the modernist on another ground, in words that are well worth quoting. He writes (page 289): “The modernist is wrong if he

flatters himself that he is in any sense Paul's successor. He argues that Paul fitted the sacrifices of the Jewish ritual to the work of Christ, and that if he discarded one element of Judaism, the modernist of today has the right to discard another. But here he errs, for he is arguing on the supposition that the sacrificial character of Christ's death is based on analogical reasoning. This is not true. The modernist is trying to explain Christianity by Judaism, but, on the contrary, it is Judaism that is to be explained by Christianity. The epistle to the Hebrews was written to show this. 'It was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.' The Jewish system was a preparation for Christ, finds its explanation in Christ, and by anticipation derived its value from the sacrifice of Christ. So says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Jewish system was 'the bringing in of a better hope'; 'that they (the Jews) without us (Christianity) should not be made perfect.' To reverse the relations between Judaism and Christianity, as some are trying to do, is in direct violation of the principles on which Christianity is founded. The modernist pays himself an unmerited compliment in supposing that he is finishing Paul's work by ridding Christianity of some of 'the weak and beggarly elements' which escaped Paul's notice."

I have said that there is no logical stopping place between evolutionary modernism and Unitarianism. But another question presses for an answer. Is even Unitarianism a logical stopping place? If the Unitarian throws overboard the historical facts that give us belief in the deity of Christ, how can he stop short of throwing overboard the historical facts that give us any Christianity at all? If the virgin birth and the miracles and the atonement and the resurrection are not true, how shall we persuade ourselves that anything in historical Christianity is true? William C. Dreher, in *The Open Court*, writes as follows: "The Fundamentalists we can understand, they being such familiar specimens. But the Modernists while almost equally familiar to us, are not so easy to understand. What can be a less attractive manifestation of human idiosyncrasy than a mind which, feeling oppressed by a certain set of beliefs, makes a weak compromise by casting off a few minor propositions of its creed and then settling back into smug self-content? Think of learned doctors of divinity rejecting the virgin birth, yet holding to the incarnation! And yet we men who began as Fundamentalists and have passed on beyond the half-way standpoints of the Modernists, are bound to look with sympathy upon the stirrings that are going on within the ranks of the latter; for it is chiefly from them that our recruits must come, and they at least recognize the possibility of intellectual motion. And again: "One of the most vital questions from which Fundamentalists and Modernists alike are drawing away attention is that of the historical elements of the Gospels. How far may their records be taken as true history? The Fundamentalist is ready with his answer—always has been ready. He can swallow everything whole—even the conflicting narratives of the nativity given by Matthew and Luke; and the more the better! But is the

position of the typical Unitarian clergyman so vastly superior, who cast overboard all the miracles, only to assert that all that remains of the Gospels is veritable history?" This is the terminus ad quem, absolute rejection of the objective facts of Christianity. This is the testimony of one who has traveled the road. And whether any ethical system can survive on the basis of pure subjectivism is scarcely a question.