

## CHAPTER II

### STEPHEN AND THE WORLD-MISSION OF CHRISTIANITY

THE Acts of the Apostles states that the world-mission of Christianity was already announced to the Apostles in and with the Easter experiences of the first Christian days. The historian records that among the numinous events, visions, auditions, and other phenomena of that extraordinary time there came as the climax and end of the revelations the intimation of the Lord to His Apostles that they would be His witnesses in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting, however, that, on the showing of the same authority, this disclosure was made only after a certain question which was trembling on the lips of the Twelve had been propounded and virtually dismissed:

‘Lord, is it at this time that You restore the Kingdom to Israel?’<sup>2</sup>

In the actual order of things, the inception of the world-mission of Christianity dates from events which had their origin in the work of Stephen; and between the Galileans with *their* outlook on history, and the proto-martyr with his, there entered as middle-term the Pentecostal baptism of the Church.

There is general agreement that the record of the opening chapters of Acts is, for the most part, based on a Jerusalem source or incorporates material amassed

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Acts i. 6 f.

by the compiler of Acts in Jerusalem and Judea. While there is some idealising of the events of the first days of the Church by the Gentile-Christian historian who, visiting Palestine and the Holy City a generation after those events, came under the powerful spell of the Mother-Church and of the Christian tradition which he found there, there is no reason to question the substantial truth of his general representation of the early days, especially in the point of the pre-occupation of the original disciples with the thought of the Lord's immediate return to set up a Kingdom in Zion.

With this pre-occupation it is possible to connect another feature in the Acts representation, which need not at all be due to idealisation, namely, the clinging of the first Galilean group of disciples to the Temple and to the Jewish ordinances. While the community had its private gatherings for instruction by the Apostles and 'the common life', and for 'the breaking of the bread' and the prayers,<sup>1</sup> the public activities of the Apostles were carried on in the Temple precincts, to which the Church and the crowds resorted.<sup>2</sup> Nor is this assiduous frequenting of the Holy Place to be set down merely to that quickening of religious life and zeal which had come to the Church through the events of the post-Resurrection days. Was there not a word of sacred prophecy in their ears which seemed to connect the Messiah's return with the glory of the Sanctuary and the honouring of the ordinances of worship?

'Look! I send My Messenger to prepare the way for Me, and the Lord whom you seek will come suddenly to His temple.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 42, 45, 46b, iv. 23 f., v. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 46a, iii. 1-3, 11 ff., v. 12, 20-21, 25, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Malachi iii. 1.

The passage is from Malachi, and the whole book of Malachi should be read for the intimate connection subsisting in the prophet's thought between the divine salvation and the right ordering of the cultus. But if prophetic expectations of this kind kept the original 'Kingdom-to-Israel' community in close adhesion to the Temple and the Jewish ordinances, it is another outlook which confronts us when we turn to Stephen and his theology in chapters vi.-vii. of Acts.

## STEPHEN

The narrative of Acts vi.-vii. rests undoubtedly on an ancient source, and embodies traditions of the origins of the world-mission of Christianity which had been preserved at Caesarea or at Antioch. Features of the record, above all, the sermon of Stephen in chapter vii. with its rugged and angular style and phrasing, and the difficulty of fitting its substance neatly into the adjoining context, point to the derivation of the material from a written document of some kind, and impart to this section of Acts a very great historical value. The narrative opens at a point when, with the introduction into the growing Church of large numbers of 'Hellenists', that is, of Jews of Diaspora birth or outlook, who had been converted to the Christian faith at Jerusalem, a remonstrance was addressed to the other section of the community, consisting of the Galilean Apostles and their adherents, that the Hellenist widows were neglected in the daily grant of relief from the common funds. The language of Acts at this point is significant: the complaint of the Hellenists is directed 'to the Hebrews'.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the grievance in

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi. 1.

question was only the symptom of a larger tension between the two groups, arising from broad differences of outlook and sympathy. In any case, the machinery for the administration of the social life of the community had broken down, and seven men, commended by their possession of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, were, according to Acts, elected by the Church and consecrated by the Apostles to meet the requirements of the new situation.

These seven men bear Hellenist names, and Stephen at once, and Philip a little later, are found exercising not merely an administrative but an evangelistic function. Stephen comes to the front as a man 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit', 'full of grace and power', whose work is attended by every kind of numinous manifestation, 'great wonders and signs', as the Acts reports.<sup>1</sup> Then comes a crisis. Stephen's teaching arouses the vehement hostility of a section of the Jewish community who, as their derivation from the Jerusalem synagogues listed in the Acts narrative—Roman, North African, Cilician and Asian—shows, were obviously Hellenistic or Diaspora Jews. Failing to make headway by argument against their formidable antagonist, these former co-religionists of Stephen instigate legal proceedings against him.

The charges formulated against Stephen in Acts vi. are interesting. For the first time in the Acts narrative we hear of a breach occurring *within* Christianity between the gospel on the one hand and the Temple and the Law on the other. Stephen is accused of blasphemy 'against Moses and God'.<sup>2</sup> We have to make the usual allowance here for the tendency inseparable from *ex parte* statements to exaggerate and distort the truth.

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vi. 11.

There can be little doubt, however, that some kind of historical foundation underlies the terms of the indictment put forward by the suborned witnesses.

'This man never stops talking against this holy place and the Law.'

'We have heard him saying that this Jesus the Nazarene means to do away with this place and to alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.'<sup>1</sup>

What, then, do these allegations actually imply on Stephen's side? That he, as a Diaspora Jew, was anti-pathetic by temperament or religious theory to the Temple, the cultus, the whole ritual element in religion as such? That is not asserted in the narrative, and it is not necessarily true. There were Diaspora Jews who, in presenting their religion to the Gentile world, turned the cloak of the Law inside out, exhibiting and stressing its inward and prophetic lining, its spiritual and ethical part, rather than its exterior of ritual requirement. In the interests of such propaganda, for instance, certain Greek iambic verses were interpolated by Jewish apologists into copies of more than one Greek dramatist. They are quoted by Pseudo-Justin,<sup>2</sup> and with some variations by Clement of Alexandria.<sup>3</sup> The former ascribes them to Philemon, the latter to Menander. An extract from the Greek text is given by Schürer,<sup>4</sup> of which a translation may be here offered.

Dost think by offerings, thy sin to hide,  
Thou bring'st, O man, the Godhead to thy side?

<sup>1</sup> Acts vi. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> *De Monarchia*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Stromateis*, V. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, 4th ed. (1909), Bd. III, p. 137, note 4.

Astray thou art, and foolish is thy thought,  
 For man to God by goodness must be brought.  
 Thy soul must answer to the measuring rod,  
 Justice alone is sacrifice to God.

But that an animus against the cultus *per se* was characteristic of the Hellenist Jews in general is too much to assume, and is disproved by the storm of indignation which Stephen's reputed blasphemy provoked in the Hellenist synagogues at Jerusalem; and that it does not supply the key to Stephen's personal position is shown by the terms in which in his apologia he speaks of the sacrifices and the Tabernacle themselves. Discoursing of Israel in the wilderness-period, Stephen avers that 'God abandoned them to worship the heavenly host', the star-gods or angels, that is, to whom the pagan nations were subject, and then he quotes the prophet Amos:

'Did you offer victims and sacrifices to Me, these forty years in the desert, O House of Israel?

Nay, what you lifted up was Moloch's tent, and the star of your god Rephan—*simulacra* which you made to worship!'

In other words, what Amos meant, according to Stephen, was not that God had not commanded sacrifices and oblations, but that Israel had diverted its offerings and its sanctuary to idolatrous purposes. We have thus to look for another explanation of Stephen's attitude to the cultus and the Law.

#### THE ESCHATOLOGY OF STEPHEN

That explanation comes to light, I think, when we study carefully Stephen's apologia, his great review of Israel's religious history which is given in the seventh

chapter of Acts. At the close of that remarkable discourse, we are told that the dying martyr, fixing his eyes on heaven, saw the 'glory of God', and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and cried:

'Look! I see heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand.'<sup>1</sup>

Stephen's direction of mind towards the Ultimate Event in the revelation of God in Christ appears here with extraordinary vividness, and it is impossible not to ask whether in this direction of mind, ordinarily called eschatology, we have not the true key to his characteristic work and witness and to much else that follows in the history of the world-mission of Christianity.

The words just quoted represent the only instance in the New Testament of the apocalyptic title 'Son of Man' being found on any lips but those of Jesus. This remarkable fact is not one to be undervalued or ignored. It is, on the face of it, a very distinct piece of evidence that, actually and historically, *Stephen grasped and asserted the more-than-Jewish-Messianic sense in which the office and significance of Jesus in religious history were to be understood.* More clearly than others, and indeed uniquely in that first age of Christianity, he perceived the universal range and bearing of the Christ-event, by which the call of God had passed from the Jewish people to embrace humanity at large.

Whereas the Jewish nationalists were holding to the permanence of their national historical privilege, and even the 'Hebrew' Christians gathered round the Apostles were, with all their new Messianic faith,

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 56.

idealising the sacred institutions of the past, 'continuing stedfastly in the temple', 'going up to the temple at the hour of prayer' which was also the hour of the sacrificial service, sheltering under the eaves of the Holy Place, Stephen saw that the Messiah was on the throne of the Universe.

The Son of Man, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, had arrived in the presence of God, and had received from God 'dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him'.<sup>1</sup> In seeing this, did Stephen also see, at the same moment, that the Temple-worship, the sacrifices, the Law, all the holy institutions of the past, were thereby transcended and antiquated, and that *the call to the Church of Jesus was to leave the Temple and all that went with it behind, and to go forward*, no longer clinging to historical securities, no longer thinking to capitalise the grace of God in the Jewish ordinances and cultus, but throwing in its lot with the crucified Son of Man, to whom the throne of the world and the Lordship of the Age to Come belonged? With this there must go another question.

All the Apostles and their followers were eschatologists. All of them, that is to say, were looking for the advent of the Lord from heaven. All were seeing in that event the Ultimate Event of time, the one thing which would give meaning to history and consummate the Divine salvation. But whereas the original Apostles and witnesses thought that Jesus would come back to *them*,—'Lord, is it at this time that You restore the Kingdom to Israel?'—*did Stephen say that they must go out and, so to speak, anticipate the Son of Man's coming by proclaiming Him to every nation and people*

<sup>1</sup> Daniel vii. 13-14.

*of that larger world which was now included in His dominion?*

These are questions that demand an answer, and the answers, of course, can only be sought in what is recorded of Stephen's own philosophy of history. When, however, we turn to his apologia with its trenchant and remorseless indictment of Israel's resistance to God in the past, we find the whole record to be indeed dominated by the sense of an Ultimate End towards which God has been ever seeking to lead and impel His people. 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham . . . and said to him Go out!' 'After the death of his father, God transported him into this land in which you now dwell.'<sup>1</sup> As long, however, as Abraham lived, he was only a wanderer, a landless *ger* in a country of promise.<sup>2</sup> So it was with Abraham's posterity, Isaac, Jacob, and the patriarchs, so it was with Joseph and Moses.<sup>3</sup> When the theophany came to Moses at the bush, it laid on him the command to 'lead forth' the people of God from Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

Now, however, begins the contradiction, the great unbelief of the people of God. All the patriarchs were itinerants, pilgrims, sojourners, seekers of a land of promise. Now comes the harking back to Egypt and the past, the resistance to God's word and Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Israel rejects Moses, the prototype and prophet of the Christ, who had received the 'living oracles' to give to it. Israel had in the desert the 'tent' or tabernacle of witness, fashioned after a revealed 'pattern'. This tent was brought into Canaan, and transmitted and maintained by 'Joshua' and the fathers. In its mobile character—so we may here fill out the interstices of the

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Acts vii. 6-21.

<sup>4</sup> Acts vii. 22-36.

<sup>5</sup> Acts vii. 37-43.

argument—the tent was a type or figure of God's never-ceasing, never-halted appointments for His people's salvation. But the time came when Israel under David desired a more stable and permanent dwelling for the Most High, and Solomon built Him a 'house'.

At this point Stephen's indignation at the situation confronting him on the side of his Jewish antagonists flares up, and quoting Solomon's words at the dedication of the Temple, he exclaims:

'The Most High does not dwell in temples made by hands. Heaven is My throne, and earth a footstool for My feet! What house will you build for Me, saith the Lord, or what is the place of My rest?'<sup>1</sup>

The point is that the Temple was not intended, any more than the Tabernacle, to become a *permanent* institution, halting the advance of the divine plan for the people of God. Turning, therefore, upon his unbelieving audience, Stephen cries: 'You always resist the Holy Spirit. . . . You received the Law in charges given by the angels, and you have not observed it.'<sup>2</sup>

It is plain that Stephen's passionate outburst at this point is not against Solomon's act in itself, for he quotes Solomon's words in defence of his own thesis. His indignation is rather at the blindness of the Jewish people at this time of crisis, at the failure of his opponents to see that with the coming of the Messiah the hour had struck for *moving on* from the Temple and the Jewish institutions. The revelation given in the Law had been superseded. Its glory had been swallowed up in a higher glory.

It has been represented—and vii, 52, with the connection which is there established between Israel's

<sup>1</sup> Acts vii. 48-49.

<sup>2</sup> Acts vii. 51, 53.

persecution of the prophets in the past and the betrayal and murder of Jesus in the present, lends some colour to the idea—that the central theme of Stephen's retrospect of history is that Israel has consistently and in every age opposed the saviours sent to it from God, and this opposition has culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus. But clearer and more consonant with the whole tenor of the discourse is the interpretation that what Israel has resisted is the supra-historical purpose which God has had for His chosen people. This purpose has been made evident at every stage of bygone religious life, and it has been ever directed to the carrying of the nation outwards and onwards to a final goal, an End not to be confused or identified with any past or present stage of religious history. Resistance to this supra-historical purpose has been the radical cause of Israel's rejection of the Lord's messengers. *Israel has been tempted to identify its salvation with historical and earthly securities and fixtures, and Stephen cannot but see the same danger in the attitude of the 'Hebrew' brethren in the Church.* His words are indeed to the Jews, but his animadversions on Moses and the Law, and on the Holy Place and the Tradition, could not but have oblique reference to the conservatism of a section of the Christian community.

Here, then, we have one most essential feature of the eschatology of Stephen. Let it be repeated that Stephen's emphasis on the Tabernacle or tent of the early days rather than on the Temple—a feature which the Epistle to the Hebrews shares in a marked degree—belongs to the very substance of his representation of religious history. *The mobile sanctuary of the early days corresponds with the idea of the ever-onward call of God to His people, the static temple does not.* But

there is more than this one feature to justify us at this point in bringing the teaching of Stephen into close comparison with that of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

THE APOLOGIA OF STEPHEN AND THE EPISTLE  
TO THE HEBREWS

So many of the emphases in these Stephen-chapters of Acts repeat themselves in the Epistle! We note:

- (a) the attitude of Stephen to the Cultus and Law of Judaism;
- (b) his declaration that Jesus means to change and supersede these things;
- (c) his sense of the divine call to the people of God being a call to 'Go out';
- (d) his stress on the ever-shifting scene in Israel's life, and on the ever-renewed homelessness of the faithful;
- (e) his thought of God's Word as 'living';
- (f) his incidental allusion to Joshua in connection with the promise of God's 'Rest';
- (g) his idea of the 'angels' being the ordainers of God's Law;
- (h) his directing of his eyes to Heaven and to Jesus.

All these are elements which recur in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the question at once arises whether Stephen's passionate concentration of mind on the eschatological nature of the Christian calling does not—through the medium of the world-mission—provide the real starting-point from which to seek an understanding of the specific message of Hebrews. Before, however, this inquiry is undertaken, it is necessary to trace a little further the historical consequences of Stephen's challenge to the Church of his time.

## THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD-MISSION

Stephen's manifesto, while primarily an attack on the unbelieving Jews, brought with it as a real though indirect consequence the shattering of the complacency of the original Jerusalem Church. It created a division in the ranks of that Church. It confirmed the conservative 'Hebrew' Christians—absorbed, all of them, in traditional ideas of the Lord's coming—in their attitude of passive waiting where they were. While the Jewish-Hellenist leaders who adhered to the martyr were 'scattered', and went out to preach the gospel, not only under the compulsion of persecution but in fidelity to Stephen's teaching, the Hebrew-Christian Apostles remained at Jerusalem,<sup>1</sup> within the covert of the Temple and the ordinances. The statement in Acts at this point probably reports only the action of the heads of the two parties, leaving the fortunes of their humbler followers undetermined. In course of time, when St. Peter, and possibly other Apostles, were constrained to move out and to take part in the wider mission inaugurated by Stephen's men, stricter, older-fashioned Christians grouped themselves around James of Jerusalem, and James was a pattern-saint of the legal and Levitical type.

The flying remnants of Stephen's party began the world-mission of Christianity first in Judea, and then in Samaria and the towns on the coast.<sup>2</sup> Here Philip was the leading spirit, and concurrent with his activities was the persecuting campaign carried on by a Rabbinical Jew, the young Saul of Tarsus.<sup>3</sup> An extension of the mission of Stephen's followers presently took them as

<sup>1</sup> Acts viii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Acts viii. 4-40.

<sup>3</sup> Acts viii. 2-3, ix. 1 ff.

far as Phoenicia and Cyprus—here undoubtedly we are following an Antiochian source-narrative of Acts—and up to this point the method of the agents had restricted their evangelism to Jews in the various areas. At Antioch, however, to which they next moved on, a section of the missionaries—Hellenist-Jewish Christians of Cyprus and Cyrene—addressed themselves to Greeks: such at least would seem to be the right understanding of the textually dubious passage, Acts xi. 20. The response was a very remarkable one, and now there appears on the scene a new convert, the most notable figure to be swept into the current of the world-mission. This was Saul of Tarsus, the very Saul who had carried on a persecuting crusade against the Church. Brought by Barnabas to Antioch, Saul quickly took his place with Barnabas at the head of the mission in that centre. In his teaching the great antithesis between the gospel and Judaism, which Stephen had formulated, became particularly pointed against the Law as a rule of moral observance rather than against the cultus, for in Saul's case, as has been noted,<sup>1</sup> the Law as the embodiment of the divine moral imperative had played the dominant part in his soul's experience of God. This fact was destined to impart a distinctive accent to St. Paul's interpretation of the gospel within the sphere of the world-mission.

It can hardly be doubted that centrifugal forces of the same kind as had carried the gospel to Antioch took it also by the hands of other followers of Stephen to other world-centres. Here unfortunately we no longer have the solid ground of the Acts narrative beneath our feet to support us, but it is scarcely possible that the message of Christianity was not brought about this

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 19 f.

time to Alexandria with its teeming Jewish-Hellenist population and its intimate connections with Jerusalem. The fact of such contact seems, indeed, to be indicated by the frequency in Acts itself of incidental references to Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, and Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> In any case, some explanation is needed of the knowledge of Christianity acquired about this period by an Alexandrian Jew of the name of Apollos, and possibly by another Alexandrian Jew who later was to write the Epistle to the Hebrews. The vagueness of the institution of Apollos in Christianity<sup>2</sup> may indicate that an organised Church had not been formed at Alexandria before the time of his leaving that city, but that his was a soul attracted and drawn in by the current of the world-mission there seems no good reason to question. We have also to explain the rise about this time of a Christian community at Rome. It is possible that here, as at Alexandria, no fully organised Church was founded at the beginning. The converts continued to be attached to the Jewish synagogue. Even as late as the close of the sixth Christian decade no fuller order may have been taken for the distinct life of the community, for St. Paul nowhere in his Epistle to the Romans (except in chapter xvi., which cannot with certainty be accepted as originally belonging to that Epistle) makes use of the word Church, and it is even conceivable that some provision for the supplementing of this deficiency was in the Apostle's mind when he wrote the words of Romans i. 11-13. The Christian community at Rome may still have passed for a Jewish 'sect': cf. Acts xxviii. 22. But whatever the facts may have been as regards the organisation of Christian life at Alexandria and Rome, the hypothesis of the 'going out' of Stephen's

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 10, vi. 9, xviii. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xviii. 24-26.

followers to these two great world-centres, though there is no record of it in Acts, would satisfactorily account for the beginnings of that life.

It is true that a widespread later tradition connected the beginnings of Alexandrian Christianity with the activity of John Mark. The most definite statement is a report cited in Eusebius to the effect that 'Mark in Egypt preached the gospel, which he also drew up in writing, and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself'.<sup>1</sup> The traditional understanding was that Mark's visit to Egypt took place after his separation from St. Paul and his mission with Barnabas in Cyprus.<sup>2</sup> Neither Clement nor Origen, however, makes any mention of a work of Mark at Alexandria, and in any case the possibility remains that other adherents of the world-mission had preached in that centre, even if they had not founded an organised Church, at an earlier time.

As for Rome, our earliest trace of the existence of Christianity in that capital centre does not go further back than A.D. 49, in which year the Emperor Claudius by an edict ordered the Jews out of the city. There is a reference to this expulsion in Acts xviii. 2 as the event which brought Aquila and Priscilla from Italy to Corinth, where St. Paul joined them in the winter of A.D. 49-50, but the same measure may account for the proceedings taken against that Apostle in the previous autumn by the civil authorities at Philippi<sup>3</sup> and by the Jewish population at Thessalonica and Beroea.<sup>4</sup> The only definite statement which has come down to us with regard to the circumstances under which the

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *History*, II. 16. See H. B. Swete's *St. Mark*, pp. xviii ff.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xv. 37-39.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xvi. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> Acts xvii. 5-7, 13.

Claudian edict was issued is the laconic notice in the Roman writer Suetonius, who says of Claudius:

'Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit.'<sup>1</sup>

If we assume that the name 'Chrestus' here is a garbled form of Christus, the meaning will be that Messianic agitations breaking out among the Jews at Rome had drawn down upon them the unfavourable notice of the public authorities, the guardians of the peace, and Claudius acted accordingly. The Jews were protected by the privilege of *religio licita* so long as they kept the peace, and this privilege they had forfeited by their intra-synagogal disputes. The most plausible explanation of the whole episode is that Christian propaganda had been introduced into the synagogues at Rome and had created considerable ferment.

The time of troubles which followed would, of course, involve the Christian members of the Roman synagogues as the prime instigators of the unrest, and it may be to the events of this period that the writer to the Hebrews later alludes when, speaking of an earlier time in his readers' history, after their first 'enlightenment' or baptism, he recalls that they were publicly subjected to insult and outrage, being stripped of their goods, or required to share the deprivations of others, all which hardships they accepted cheerfully, sympathising with prisoners, knowing that there was reserved for them a great and enduring reward.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, *Claudius*, XXV.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews x. 32-34.

DIVISIVE ISSUES CREATED BY THE WORLD-MISSION  
OF CHRISTIANITY

The great question which concerns us here, in tracing the early course of the world-mission of Christianity, is to determine to what extent the root-principles of Stephen's teaching, his vision of the supra-historical, eschatological nature of the Christian calling, and his opposition of the gospel to the cultus and Law of Judaism as things which Christ had superseded, would be kept to the front in the preaching of his followers. In particular we have to ask—for consideration of this point can no longer be deferred—*whether there would not be a tendency everywhere in the Jewish division of the Church, now mostly drawn from Jewish-Hellenist circles, to form into two parties, determined by the respective attitudes taken, under various stresses, to the Mosaic Law and ordinances of the past.* That such a cleavage of sympathies did take place in the Churches within the Pauline sector of the world-mission is notorious. At Antioch, in the Churches of Galatia, at Philippi, and at Corinth, parties arose for the Law and against the freedom preached by the Apostle. It will not do to assume offhand that the *whole* of the Jewish section in every Church was for the Law, and that the party for freedom was always Gentile. As in the Church at Jerusalem in Stephen's time, the wedge may well have driven itself into and through the Jewish-Christian section of the Churches. Unless we recognise this possibility, we may be over-simplifying the Christian history of the apostolic age. As it is, the division in the Pauline Churches, though radical, turned primarily on the *Law* in the point of its authority or meaning for Christian life and conduct. The issue owed its

sharpness, as we have noticed,<sup>1</sup> to St. Paul's particular and psychological predetermination of religious mind. But the possibility that the *cultus* also would enter as a dividing issue in other Churches, if there was any faithfulness to the terms of Stephen's original protest at Jerusalem, must not be overlooked.

It must be remembered that the Law had a ritual and ceremonial as well as an ethical side, and this, of course, was implicitly recognised and covered by the Pauline theology of the subject. But the ritual and ceremonial part of the Law, in the last resort, ran up into, and was concentrated in the sacrificial cultus at Jerusalem. And Jews who had been accustomed to hear 'Moses' read and preached in the synagogues of the Diaspora Sabbath by Sabbath<sup>2</sup> would not all, when they became Christians, readily feel themselves immediately dispensed from all further obligation to the ritual and the ordinances, or be able to regard these as no longer in any sense binding.

The recommendations urged upon St. Paul by James and the presbyters, on the occasion of his last visit to Jerusalem, are a case in point, and they are of great interest for us. They concerned four Jewish-Christian brethren who had taken a 'vow', and St. Paul was asked—for politic reasons be it admitted—to associate himself with these brethren in the vow, to share the ritual acts, and to defray the monetary charges required for the completion of their 'purification'. The requirements included punctilious fulfilment of the votive obligations, visits to the Temple, ceremonial discharge from the vows, and the offering of a sacrifice for each of the votaries.<sup>3</sup> That St. Paul complied with these requirements shows that the cultus-issue might still, under circumstances, exert its pressure on Jewish

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 19 f., 38.   <sup>2</sup> Acts xv. 21.   <sup>3</sup> Acts xxi. 20-26.

Christians, even Hellenists, and though that pressure would be less strong in centres remote from Jerusalem and the ancient sanctuary, a certain sentiment of reverence for the cultus may be expected to have preserved itself even there. This would continue at least down to the Fall of Jerusalem and the cessation of the sacrifices in the year 70.

If this is recognised, the green light is given us to go forward to the Epistle to the Hebrews with the possibility in our minds that the teaching of Stephen, with which, as we have seen, the Epistle has so many features in common, is not only the matrix within which the theological ideas elaborated in Hebrews first took shape, but indirectly explains *the existence of a minority in the Roman Church who in reaction from the larger freedom of the world-mission gospel were asserting principles and counter-claims akin to those of the original 'Hebrew' section in the Jerusalem Church.* On this hypothesis the author of Hebrews will have been a fervent upholder of the world-mission gospel, who writes to warn this disaffected group, to whom he is personally known, of the serious dangers attending their position. The group are living in the past, they are holding on to old securities, they are 'neglecting' that divine 'salvation' which now in Christ has entered on its final phase or manifestation. What is at stake, the writer tells them, is nothing less than their 'share' in Christ and in the life of 'the world to come'.

So far, all this is only a possibility, only a hypothesis which has to be tested. But to accept the Epistle to the Hebrews as a document of the world-mission of Christianity, comparable with, though distinct in many features from the Pauline proclamation, opens for us an entrancing vista. We stand at a point where, as we

watch the river of Christianity flowing to the sea, we see it forming for itself various courses, parallel to a certain extent and complementary. Two of these channels may be recognised in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the Pauline literature. Here it will be well to keep before the mind the great constitutive features of the world-mission gospel: first, its concentration on the eschatological, heavenly calling of the Church, a point common to all the derivative theologies, though expressed in different forms; secondly, its proclamation of the transcendence of Jesus over the Law and the sacrificial order of the past, which also is common to all, though defined in variant terms. In St. Paul, for example, we find redemption characteristically expressed in forensic terms of *dikaiosune* or 'rightness with God'. In Hebrews it is in ritual terms of *hagiasmos* or 'purification' for approach to God. In the Johannine literature it is in mystical terms of the eternal 'light', 'life', 'love' which have made themselves known in Jesus. All these terms may be interpreted as so many signal-lights demarcating the various channels along which thought in the Christian mission is streaming out into the world's life.

It remains to notice that some exponents of the modern interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews have glanced at the teaching of Stephen, but glanced at it only to turn away. Dr. Moffatt, for example, admitted that the closest approach to Hebrews within the New Testament literature in the matter of its typological method and exegetical freedom in handling the Old Testament was to be found in Stephen's discourse in Acts vii. Nevertheless he held the parallelism to break down at such points as the silence of Hebrews with regard to the crime of the Jews in putting Jesus

to death, a charge which Stephen labours and grounds on the age-long obstinacy and—Dr. Moffatt adds—the ‘externalism’ of Israel.<sup>1</sup> But surely the very close analogy between Stephen’s teaching and the doctrine of the Epistle is not essentially damaged by the absence of correspondence at this particular point. Hebrews is addressed not to the Jewish nation but to a community of persons within the Christian Church who, though they need to be reminded of the fundamental truths which Stephen taught and the world-mission proclaims, were not themselves involved in the crime of the Jewish people against Jesus and therefore do not come under the brunt of this part of Stephen’s attack. No conclusions are, therefore, to be drawn at this point either as against the dependence of Hebrews on Stephen’s general principles or in favour of the non-Jewish extraction of the Christians addressed in the Epistle. Dr. E. F. Scott gives fuller recognition to the importance of Stephen’s utterance as a factor in the development of the Gentile-Christian Churches and their theology. He admits that ‘ideas . . . uncoloured by Paulinism . . . had come, through Stephen, as a direct heritage from the Church at Jerusalem’.<sup>2</sup> But when Dr. Scott speaks of Stephen’s discourse as an ‘apparently aimless summary of Old Testament events’, it may be thought that he has not fully measured the significance of Stephen for the understanding of our Epistle. He has overlooked the eschatology, the concentration of thought on the transcendent, heavenly end of the religious calling, which is the key at once to Stephen’s reading of history and to the theology of the writer to the Hebrews.

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Hebrews*, pp. lxii f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 63-65.