

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT OF THE EPISTLE.—I. THE PERSON AND OFFICE OF THE REDEEMER

THE FINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION (i. 1-2)

God spoke in old time to our fathers through the prophets. It was in manifold and very varied ways. He has now at the close of these days spoken to us through a Son—one whom He has appointed to be the universal Heir.

The Word of God to man in Christ has come as the climax and last stage in the long diversified history of God's communication with His people Israel. The revelation of divine truth in the past came 'through the prophets' and was effected in multiple and various ways, literally 'by many parts and in many forms'. The method was that one part of the truth was delivered at one time, another part at another time. Now one sort of language was employed, now another sort. When the writer speaks of the 'parts' of this divine economy, he may have been thinking of the traditional division of the Old Testament books into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, or, going further back into the past, to the period before the books existed, he may have had in mind such an analysis of the primary sources of revelation as we find in the prophetic sum-

mary, Jeremiah xviii. 18: 'Law will not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.' The *torah* of the priests, the *d'barim* of the prophets, the *hokhmah* of the wise, these were the ultimate springs of that knowledge of God in Israel which was finally gathered up into the Bible. The many 'forms', in turn, will have included such media of revelation as God's mighty acts in history, as well as theophanies, visions, auditions, dreams, signs, oracles, and other intimations of the divine will granted to the patriarchs or to the prophets. But all these are now transcended and superseded in the manifestation made to the world in Jesus, who is God's supreme and last Word to men.

This revelation through Christ has come 'at the End—in these days', that is to say, in the final stage or phase of world-history. The writer brings in the *eschatological* note which, as we have seen, rings through and through his practical warnings to his readers. With Christ the last hour of time has struck. The New Age, the eternal, final order, has announced itself. Jesus is the messenger and instrument not only of a 'better' salvation than was revealed in the past, but of an 'eternal' salvation, one having the nature of eternity in it. The finality of the Christian revelation is marked not by its temporal incidence alone, but by the transcendent character of the Person, the rank, the status, and the authority of Him through whom and in whom it comes. Here is not a prophet but a Son, who as the Messiah of God is the Lord of history, the divinely appointed Inheritor of the ages.

The doctrine of the Person of Christ in the Epistle thus shows a definitely Jewish Messianic basis and starting-point, but it reaches far beyond this. In the

ancient Hebrew kingdom, in the days of the multi-partite and very various revelation through the prophets, the king of Israel, as the head of the elect people of God, was the visible representative and pledge to the nation of the divine blessing, and an instrument of the saving and sanctifying virtue, energy, and presence of God in its life. He was, as such, invested with quasi-divine titles and honours as the anointed 'Son' of God.¹ When with the deepening of the awareness of God's holiness and the increasing sense of the nation's sin which had come through the prophets,² the hope of the divine salvation and righteousness was projected into a future age, the idea of a righteous king of David's line who should be the instrument, assurance, and sacrament of God's saving presence with His people was projected forwards with it. In later Judaism, however, the title 'Son of God' was allowed to drop out, probably in consequence of the reaction which had long set in against language shared by the Hebrews with their polytheistic Canaanite neighbours.³ Now in Christianity the conception of the Messiah as the Son of God has come back, but on a higher level of revelation, and with immeasurably new force and depth of meaning, through the person, character, and relation to God the Father, of Jesus. God has spoken to us in a Son.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST IN REVELATION.

THE WISDOM CHRISTOLOGY (i. 3-14)

Through Him also He made the world. He, the radiance of God's glory and the very expression of His essence,

¹ Psalms ii. 1-9, lxxxix. 19-27, cx. 1-4; Isaiah ix. 6-7, xi. 1-10, etc.

² Cf. Isaiah vi. 1-5. ³ See Aage Bentzen, *Messias* (1948).

the sustainer also of the universe by His word of power, has now, after effecting the purification of our sins, taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He has become as much greater than the angels as the Name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs (i. 3-4).

The full range of the significance of Jesus in revelation now appears in a series of predicates which, it is plain, constitute for the author and his readers the *presuppositions* of faith, the foundation-truths of the Christian religion. As such, they appear also in St. Paul¹ and in the Gospel according to John.² For the writer to the Hebrews these truths do not need to be demonstrated or explained. They belong to the givenness of the received gospel. The predications which are made with regard to Jesus here are four in number.

- I. He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the predestined Inheritor of all things (i. 1-2*a*).
- II. He is the Wisdom or Logos of God, through whom God made the worlds, and who upholds them (i. 2*b*-3*a*).
- III. He has effected the purification of our sins (i. 3*b*).
- IV. He sits at God's right hand, exalted above the angels (i. 3*c*-4).

To these four articles, which represent the primary substance of the Church's confession of Christ, the writer appends (i. 5-14) a sequence of Scripture proof-texts, nearly all drawn from the Psalms, and carefully arranged to provide point-to-point support for the successive statements. Thus (*a*) Psalm ii. 7 and

¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians i. 30, viii. 5-6; Colossians i. 14-17.

² Cf. i. 1-4, 14, 16-17, etc.

of the earth, then I was by Him as a master workman, and I was daily His delight.'

In Ecclesiasticus xxiv. the same conception is wrought out with special emphasis upon the indwelling and activity of Wisdom in Israel; Wisdom, the pre-cosmic Word of God, the primal Light, was symbolised in the pillar of cloud, and ministered in the holy tabernacle in the beloved city of Jerusalem; she took root among the glorified people of the Lord's inheritance. It is Wisdom that is revealed in the Torah of Israel and in prophecy. In the book of the Wisdom of Solomon vii. 21 ff. the inwardness of the indwelling of this principle is elaborated by aid of a philosophical terminology borrowed from the Greeks:

'She pervades and penetrates all things by reason of her pureness. For she is a breath of the power of God and a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty. . . . She is an effulgence from everlasting light, and an unspotted mirror of the working of God, and an image of His goodness. . . . From generation to generation, passing into holy souls, she makes men friends of God and prophets.'

Wisdom, therefore, is personified in these books as the principle of the divine energy and activity in creation and history, the principle also of all communication between God and the spirit of man. When and where the identification or conjunction of this principle with the Messiah-concept first took place cannot be precisely determined. There existed the potentiality of such a conjunction in the promise to the Davidic Messiah of 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the

fear of the Lord' (Isaiah xi. 2), and in the endowment of the apocalyptic Son of Man with 'the spirit of wisdom, and the spirit which gives insight, and the spirit of understanding' (1 Enoch xlix. 3). But while there was thus an approach to a combination of the concepts from the side of the Jewish Messiah-idea, strangely enough there was no reciprocal movement from the side of the Jewish Wisdom-theology. There we find that, though in Ecclesiasticus and the Jewish Alexandrian literature Wisdom is identified with the Torah and with the Spirit of God, it is not brought into any relation to the Messiah, for the Messiah has no place in that literature. Philo also, while he gives a wide extension of meaning to the idea of the Logos, and provides this principle with a variety of Old Testament theological titles, such as Son of God, Firstborn, Name of God, Heavenly Man or man in the Image of God, nowhere gives a Messianic sense to these titles or includes in his synthesis the name of the Messiah.¹ On the other hand, in St. Paul, in the Fourth Gospel, and here in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the identification of the Wisdom of God with the Christ of God is as instinctive as it is complete. *We seem warranted, therefore, in concluding that the conjunction of the Messiah-concept and the Wisdom-concept first occurred within the Christian Church, and indeed, as the convergent evidence of St. Paul, Hebrews, and the Johanne literature shows, within the theology of the world-mission.* And there it started, not from any theorisings about the principle of Wisdom, but rather from the revelational value of what had come to the Church in Jesus who as the Messiah or Son of Man, the Lord of all nations, was also the Light of the nations, as prophets

¹ For Philo see especially *De Conf. Ling.*, 146.

(Isaiah) and apocalyptists (1 Enoch xlvi. 4) had declared.

In this connection it is to be noticed that, whereas Philo's synthesis of other concepts with the Logos signified the drawing of these concepts over to the side of what was at best a religious-philosophical abstraction, in Christianity the opposite has happened. The abstract semi-philosophical notions of the Wisdom or Logos of God are drawn over to, and absorbed into the personal Christ of the Church's faith, a clear evidence of the superior power and dominating influence of the living spirit of Jesus. In the light of this result we are justified in saying that the Wisdom or Logos conception of Judaism was at best only a Messianic potential, only a prophetic type of the Messiah. It needed a more vital religious impulse than Judaism itself could generate to effect the ultimate synthesis of the conceptions.

It may be added that the Christian identification of Jesus the Messiah with the divine Wisdom or creative Word of God in the Old Testament would be part of the same general process by which He, in whom the eternal world was revealed to faith, was seen as active in the Old Testament history during His *pre-incarnate* life. If, for example, it is the pre-incarnate Son of God who, according to Hebrews x. 5-10, speaks the words 'Lo, I come to do Thy will' in Psalm xl., the same kind of reasoning could ascribe to Him the already quoted words uttered by Wisdom in Proverbs viii. 22 ff. and elsewhere.

In our passage of Hebrews, though the title of Wisdom or Logos is not expressly assigned to Jesus, the Wisdom-derivation of the explicative predicates used to bring out His cosmic significance is quite in-

dubitable. The term 'radiance' or 'effulgence' of the divine glory, for example, repeats an epithet applied to Wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon vii. 25-26, as we have seen, and the conceptions of Christ as the 'expression' or 'imprint' of God's being and as the instrument of God in creation carry forward elements of the same Alexandrian theology. But in Christianity an immense and endless new significance has been imparted to these terms, as also to the Messianic idea, through their ascription to Jesus as the personal Revealer of God.

We may say, then, that in the course of the earliest development of Christian thought the conception of the Person of Jesus in its significance for religion passed through two stages of expression. In the first of these stages it took to itself the Messianic terminology of Palestinian Judaism, and on the lips both of Jesus and of His followers enunciated itself by the aid of the titles 'Christ', 'Son of God', and 'Son of Man'. Only through such language could the finality of the revelation made in the word and work of Jesus be stated in a form adequate for the purpose and sufficiently related to the history of prophetic religion in the past. Secondly, with the beginnings of the Christian world-mission the Church's proclamation of Jesus took over, in addition, the vocabulary of the Jewish-Alexandrian school of Wisdom-theology. This medium of expression, connecting as it did on the one side with the Old Testament conception of the Word or Torah of God, and on the other side with the Greek idea of the divine Mind or Reason operative in the universe, brought out for the larger world the ultimate nature of the claim made for Jesus in the confession of the Church.

THE INCARNATION IN RELATION TO MAN,
SUFFERING, AND SIN (ii. 5-18)

For it is not to the angels that God has subjected the World to Come, of which we speak. A speaker has in one place declared himself in these terms: 'What is man that Thou rememberest him? or the son of man that Thou payest him any heed? Thou hast made him for a little time lower than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and set him over the works of Thy hands, Thou hast placed all things under his feet.' Now, in this placing of 'all things under him' he has left out nothing that is not so placed. But, as it is, we do not yet see all things placed under man. What we see is Jesus. He is 'made for a little time lower than the angels' in order to suffer death. He is 'crowned with glory and honour' that by the grace of God He might experience death on behalf of every man (ii. 5-9).

The starting-point of the writer's argument has been the transcendence of Jesus over the angels, who are the ordainers and custodians of the Jewish Law; but in thinking of the angels the writer's mind is carried to Psalm viii., which speaks of man's place with reference to these celestial beings, and this gives the writer a chance to speak of Jesus in His relation to men. The Psalm speaks of 'man' or 'son of man' as having had conferred on him by God the rank described as only 'a little lower than the angels', and as being 'crowned with glory and honour' and set over all God's works, with the whole world placed under his control. Now, says the writer, this statement does not correspond with what we see actually taking place in nature and in history. We do not see man in possession, man as

absolute master of all things in the world. But looking at Jesus we see the prophecy fulfilled and His supremacy achieved. Therefore the Psalm relates to Jesus. It is He, this particular 'Son of Man', who in His incarnate life is 'made for a little time lower than the angels with a view to the suffering of death', and who is 'crowned with glory and honour' that by the grace of God¹ He might experience death on behalf of universal man. The writer understands both the humiliation and the exaltation or coronation of Jesus to have taken place for the sake of the oblation made on the Cross. The glory, as well as the humiliation, is for Christian eyes ('we see') already present in the Incarnate Life. Here two observations fall to be made.

(1) In form, the argument is exactly similar to the one attributed in Acts ii. 25-36 to the Apostle Peter, who on the day of Pentecost reasons that, since the prediction of David in Psalm xvi. 10, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, nor suffer Thy holy one to see corruption', was not fulfilled in the case of the patriarch himself, therefore it is a prophetic reference to Jesus whom Christians know to be risen from the dead. In the Hebrews passage the interpretation given to Psalm viii. establishes the supremacy of Jesus as the Head

¹ The reading 'by the grace of God' in this verse (ii. 9) is that of all Greek MSS. (except M and 424) and of all ancient Versions (except three Codices of the Peshitto). It was also apparently the only reading known to Eusebius, Athanasius, and Chrysostom. But another reading 'apart from God', which is found in M and 424, was known to Origen, Theodoret, Ambrose, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Jerome: it was preferred by Origen (who follows it in four out of six passages in which he cites the verse) and strongly defended by Theodoret. Origen took it to mean that Christ was to taste death for everyone 'except God'. See Dr. Moffatt's note in his *Commentary*, pp. 26 f. We may agree with Dr. Moffatt that the good connection of the reading 'by the grace of God' with the 'It befitted God' of the immediately succeeding verse is a point in its favour.

of humanity and the Representative of the race with God.

(2) It is to be noted, as Dr. E. F. Scott points out, that the author's intense interest in this passage is concentrated upon the *suffering* by which, in His identification of Himself with men, the Christ was prepared for His function as our High-Priest in things pertaining to God.¹ Nothing, for example, is said of His teaching, His revelation of the nature and the will of God. We find a similar concentration of interest again where the writer comes to deal with the Old and the New Covenants in chapters viii.-x. The Old Covenant and the Law went together, but the writer's interest in the Law is not in point of its particular commandments—nothing is said, for instance, of circumcision, or of the Sabbath, or of the dietary regulations—but in its design as a whole 'to secure for Israel the right of access to God'. Hence everything is subordinated to the cultus and, in particular, to the priesthood, for it was on the basis of the latter (vii. 11) that the Law was enacted for the people of God.

For it was appropriate that God, He for whom and through whom the whole of things exists, should, in the act of bringing many sons to glory, perfect by suffering the Pioneer of their salvation. The Sanctifier and the sanctified here form a unity. That is the reason for His not being ashamed to call them His brethren when He says 'I will declare Thy name to My brethren, within the Church I will sing to Thee', and again, 'I will be confident in Him', and again, 'Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.' Since the children participate in blood and flesh, He similarly has accepted His share in these, that by dying He might reduce to

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 98 f.

impotence him who exercises his sovereignty in death—that means, the devil—and thereby release all those who throughout their life were bound like slaves under the fear of death. Clearly, it is not to the help of the angels that Jesus comes, but to the help of the race of Abraham. Obligation was upon Him to be assimilated to His brethren in every way, and so to become a merciful and faithful High-Priest in His service of God, in the making of an expiation for the sins of the people. In the suffering He has Himself sustained under His temptation lies His power to help those who are tempted (ii. 10-18).

In this supremely great passage the writer, having in mind what he has just said about the Incarnate Life of Jesus as revealing, alike in its humiliation and in its glory, the predestination of the Son of Man to suffering, speaks of the divine appropriateness of it all. 'It befitted God' that His purpose of redemption—His act of bringing 'many sons' to the glory of the World to Come—should plumb the whole depth of human anguish and death. For the realisation of this right requirement it was necessary that the 'Son' of God, who was to be the agent and the 'Pioneer', should in His own person not only exhibit perfect obedience to God, but achieve also a perfect identification of Himself with men, and thus be qualified to be our perfect Minister with God. The Gospel of St. Matthew speaks in one passage of what was proper or fitting for Jesus,¹ and St. Paul repeatedly alludes to what is proper or fitting for the faithful,² but only the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament uses this kind of language with reference to God. When he speaks of the fitness of God's action, we may recall, however, that

¹ Matthew iii. 15.

² 1 Corinthians xi. 13, Ephesians v. 3, 1 Timothy ii. 10, Titus ii. 1.

Old Testament prophets are found constantly appealing to God by reference to His own revealed character of righteousness and mercy. They judge God by God, so to speak, and insist on the divine consistency. So here, if what is 'proper' to God comes in as standard of judgment, the approach is not from any idealistically conceived standpoint but from the self-evidence of the revelation of grace granted in Jesus Christ Himself. The God who is so judged, however, is the God of creation and of history, 'from whom and through whom', says the writer, 'the whole of things exists'. The Passion of Jesus, in other words, in which we have the true measure of the divine character, is not irrational or irrelevant with reference to the divine ordering of the world, but is of its very structure and essence. In support of the utter self-identification of Jesus with men, by which the Sanctifier and the sanctified are revealed in their unity, the writer cites a trio of Old Testament passages¹ which once again show that, where psalmists and prophets spoke, the overtones, so to speak, were those of the pre-existent Christ. And here, in speaking of the complete participation of the Incarnate Christ in the 'children's' blood and flesh, the writer comes to something which calls for fuller critical remark and elucidation.

JESUS HERO AND PRIEST

When the writer, in the first verse of the above passage (ii. 10-18), gives to the Son of God the title of 'Pioneer' (*archegos*) or *Bahnbrecher* of our salvation, there slips in the note of what may be definitely called

¹ Psalm xxii. 22, Isaiah viii. 17, 18.

a 'Hero-Christology'.¹ Jesus is conceived as the Leader or Protagonist who, going in front or at the head of His redeemed host, beats down the forces opposed to them, and so becomes the Founder or Inaugurator of their 'salvation'. This conception comes into clear light at the heart of the passage, where it is said that the purpose underlying the assumption by the Son of God of the children's blood and flesh was that He might 'defeat' the devil, who exercised his sovereignty in death, and by that stroke release all those who, like slaves, were cowed and bent low throughout their earthly existence beneath 'the fear of death'.

A form of the same Christology confronts us in St. Paul as, for example, in 1 Corinthians ii. 6-8, where the Apostle writes that 'if the Archons (Rulers, supernaturally conceived) of the present world-order had known the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory', and thereby subjected themselves to surprise and overthrow. It occurs again more pointedly in Colossians ii. 15, where the Apostle represents Christ on the Cross as 'disarming the Powers and Authorities' and 'making a public spectacle of them, by triumphing over them' on the Cross. A similar Christology is expressed again in the Fourth Gospel in the word (xii. 31): 'The time has come for the judgment of the world, and for the Prince of this world to be expelled; and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself', and in the prediction (xiv. 30): 'The Prince of this world comes, and he has no hold over Me'. In the Synoptic Gospels also the same Christology is present, not only in the narrative

¹ Cf. the article by the late Canon Wilfrid L. Knox on 'The Divine Hero Christology in the New Testament' in *Harvard Theological Review*, October 1948.

of the temptation of the Son of God in the wilderness and in the whole tremendous engagement of Jesus with demonic forces in human life, but in words like 'I beheld Satan fallen like a lightning-brand from heaven' (Luke x. 18), or 'Simon, Satan has asked to have you (all), to sift you (all) like wheat, but I have prayed for thee' (Luke xxii. 31). In the light of this conjunct evidence of St. Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, and the Johannine literature we seem justified in assuming that a type of Hero-Christology, in which Jesus, like a Christian Herakles,¹ is locked in mortal conflict with the powers of darkness and overthrows them by His Cross and Resurrection or, alternatively, is sent by God 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' and condemns sin in the flesh to death (Romans viii. 3), belonged to the primordial substance of the world-mission theology of the Church.

While, however, the writer to the Hebrews also knows it and gives expression to it in the present passage, he does not pursue this line of Christology any further, but immediately diverts the stream of his argument away to the priestly ministry of Jesus. Jesus came to the help of Abraham's race, not of the angels. Yes! He had to be assimilated in every way to His brethren. Yes! But all this was that He might 'become a merciful and faithful *High-Priest* in His service of God, in the making of an expiation for the sins of the people'.

This is the point at which to raise a question of the first critical magnitude. If the writer of this Epistle was addressing not a Jewish-Christian audience but some other undifferentiated group representing the general body of the Church, *why does his Christology*

¹ *Harvard Theological Review*, October 1948, pp. 245 f.

at this point turn so completely and irreversibly in the direction of a hieratical and ritual interpretation of the work of Jesus Christ? If the persons whom the author had in mind were ordinary Hellenistic Christians who were discouraged perhaps because the Lord had not come, and were tempted to lapse into apathy or to fall again to pagan errors, could he not have made capital use of this Hero-Christology which, even if every reference to Greek mythological analogies were ruthlessly expunged, could yet be counted upon to engage subconscious elements in the Greek mind and to awaken new courage and hope? Death overthrown! The powers of hell vanquished! Why does the writer turn so insistently in all that follows of the Epistle to the one subject of Christ as our Priest and of Christ's self-oblation in death as an expiation for our sins? Why this Priest-Christology? Indeed, the question cannot be repressed: Would the author have addressed himself in this way to any other than a Jewish-Christian audience whose full Christian development was being retarded by some kind of sentimental attraction or influence proceeding from the ancient Jewish sacraments of grace?

Admittedly, a pure Hero-Christology would not have satisfied the writer any more than it satisfied St. Paul or the Fourth Evangelist. It would not have brought out *quanti ponderis sit peccatum*. But why does he turn for the fuller elucidation of Christ's function as Redeemer to the institutions of the priesthood and the cultus? We shall have to return to this point presently.

We pass over the section iii. 1-iv. 16, which was considered in the earlier survey of the admonitory material of the Epistle, and come to the central thematic subject of the first half of the work. It should be noticed that

already on two occasions (ii. 17-18 and iv. 14-16) the author has led his argument up by deliberate stages to the High-Priesthood of Jesus.

PRIEST BY PREDESTINATION AND INCARNATE
QUALIFICATION (v. 1-10)

For every high-priest who is taken from the ranks of men is appointed to act on behalf of men in their relations with God. It is that he may offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is one who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring, since he too in himself is beset with weakness: and for this reason too he is obliged to present sin-offerings for himself as well as for the people. Moreover, no one takes the office to himself, but (only as he is) called to it by God, as Aaron was. So also the Christ did not by any self-glorification attain to His High-Priesthood. It was God saying to Him, 'Thou art My Son, I have this day begotten Thee', just as in another place He says, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedek' (v. 1-6).

The ordinances for the high-priest in the religion of Israel were intended, as Dr. E. F. Scott says, 'to illuminate the nature of that higher ministry whereby the true access to God could at last be realised'.¹ With the observance of the provisions for the priesthood and the sacrifices, as with the ordinances for the king and the royal supremacy, the Divine Blessing, the virtue, energy, power, and presence of God with His people were bound up. These could only exist and operate in Israel as the ceremonial purity of the nation was maintained or, when lost, restored. But it is not just to say that the writer to the Hebrews, in making use

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 123 f.

of these ancient ideas, is attempting to pour new wine into old bottles and is confusing the character of the Christian religion by appeal to outworn ceremonies and institutions. As Dr. Scott himself acknowledges, the writer's attention to the details of the Old Testament regulations throughout the Epistle is neither thorough nor exact, and this suggests that the starting-point and basis of his interest is not the old ritual but Christ. Certainly it is not a case of his pouring the new wine into old containers, but, on the contrary, he absorbs the old types and ordinances into Christ's fulfilment of them.

No comment is needed on the passage v. 1-10 except that the author, in citing the analogy of the Aaronic priesthood, stresses its inward side and its divine call rather than its titular privilege as derived by family lineage. According to the Law on the latter point, 'no stranger, who is not of the seed of Aaron, may come near to burn incense before the Lord' (Numbers xvi. 40); nevertheless the divine call operates in this legislation, and a moral urgency existed in Israel that the priest should be inwardly conformed to the nature of his office. His liturgical function to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins morally presupposes in him the capacity in some sense to take the sins and frailties of men upon himself. His sense of his oneness with men in weakness and need is kept alive by the continuous obligation (Leviticus ix. 7, xvi. 17) to make atonement-offerings for himself as well as for the commonwealth of Israel. Nor must it be forgotten that the same compulsion lies at the heart of his other essential function, his didactic office as giver to Israel of the Torah of God, though the writer does not here or elsewhere allude to this task as appertaining either to the

priest or to Jesus.¹ His sympathetic and inward presentation of the priesthood in Israel is, nevertheless, to be noted, and it may well owe its essential character to the writer's profound insight into the Saviour's vicarious relation to sinful and suffering men. The writer is one who has meditated on the character of Christ as Priest, and so has been led to see what all ministerial priesthood, in its own place, is intended to be.

His analysis of the divine call of the Saviour is into the two elements, derived from the Messianic Psalms of Israel:

'Thou art my Son' (Psalm ii. 7).

'Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek' (Psalm cx. 4).

The fact that the writer is not content to express the Saviour's mission in terms of Psalm ii. 7 alone shows that neither a pure Hero-Christology nor a merely spiritual Filial-Christology such as might have been drawn out of that Psalm would have satisfied him. Nevertheless, the recognition that some addition was necessary does not of itself explain why the particular addendum should be taken from Psalm cx. The voice 'Thou art My Son' is attested by the Synoptic tradition.² Is it not possible that the other voice, 'Thou art a Priest for ever', was also a part of the primitive tradition of the world-mission, though the written Gospels do not attest it?

It is contended by Dr. E. F. Scott, indeed, that the doctrine of the Priesthood of Christ in the Epistle represents a new and individual feature in the writer's

¹ On the priesthood of Israel and its teaching function see Pedersen's *Israel*, III-IV, pp. 150-197, especially 160-164.

² Mark i. 11, ix. 7; Matthew iv. 3, 6, etc.

theology, not a remoulding of traditional ideas. But it is difficult to sustain this judgment in the face of the 110th Psalm, and in the face also of such other facts as that in Maccabean times a Messiah from the house of Levi was expected, and that the Zadokite party which sprang up within the priesthood in the second century before Christ expected the advent of a Messiah 'from Aaron and Israel'.¹

In the days of His flesh, He brought prayers and supplications with passionate cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and because of His godliness He was heard. Thus, though Son, He learned obedience through the things He suffered, and being thereby perfected, He has become in His person the source of an eternal salvation for all who obey Him, with the title from God of 'High-Priest after the order of Melchizedek' (v. 7-10).

The purpose of these moving words, which sound the very depths of the writer's reflection on the spiritual drama of the life of Jesus, is to show how intensely Jesus entered into the human lot. It was this experience that wrung from Him His prayers and entreaties, cries and tears; for man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards. 'No theoretical reflection on the qualification of priests or upon the dogma of Messiah's sinlessness', writes Dr. Moffatt, 'could have produced such passages as this.'² But while that is true, it may have been the dwelling of his mind on the character of the Saviour as *Priest* that made the writer to the Hebrews more sensitive to this side of the human story

¹ See R. H. Charles, 'Fragments of a Zadokite Work' in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, II. pp. 785 and 795 f.

² *Commentary* on the passage.

of Jesus than any other writer in the New Testament. He has before his mind the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane or some tradition of His words resembling that which comes to expression in the Fourth Gospel:

' Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say?

" Father, save Me from this hour ? "

Nay, I have come to this hour for this cause.

" Father, glorify Thy name " ! '

Such traditions, illustrating at once the stress and anguish of Jesus and His 'reverence' for God, were carried at the heart of the world-mission of Christianity, for it was out of the preaching and teaching of the world-mission that the Gospels arose. The writer will, by appeal to this soul-travail, show us what it was for Jesus to be a Son, and what it was to be a Priest, and what it was to be both of these things together. 'He learned obedience by the things He suffered', thus supremely illustrating in His person the truth of the Greek adage immortally expressed in the famous lines of Aeschylus:

By Zeus in heaven,
Who set us mortals on the road of thought,
Was the rule given—

' Wisdom by suffering must for man be wrought!'

This a compelling grace man owns

Of heavenly Spirits on their august Thrones.¹

Nor can there be any doubt that for the writer the suffering, the prayers, and the cries of Jesus were part of the sacrificial Oblation by which the obedient Son of God became also for us the perfectly qualified Priest, the author of a salvation having the nature of eternity in it.

No demonstration could be clearer of the place which

¹ *Agamemnon*, 176 ff.

the human life of Jesus has in the Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. As Dr. E. F. Scott observes, there is no refusal here to know Christ 'after the flesh', as in 2 Corinthians v. 16: no discrimination of any essential kind between a first manifestation of the Son of God after the flesh and a second post-Resurrection stadium in which the manifestation is 'after the Spirit of holiness', as in Romans i. 3-4. Nor are the human attributes of Jesus visibly pervaded and penetrated at every point, as in the Fourth Gospel, by the divine. It is a real Incarnation which is described in Hebrews. The Passion of the Saviour is apprehended in the deeply emotional character of His human experience, and 'in words of exquisite feeling' is presented for the response of feeling on our part. In this respect, as Dr. Scott recognises, the Epistle to the Hebrews comes nearer to modern sentiment than, perhaps, any book in the New Testament.¹

We pass over the section v. 11-vi. 20, which has been considered in another connection.

PRIEST AFTER THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK. PRIEST OF THE RESURRECTION (vii. 1-28)

The writer will now show that the predestination of Jesus the Messiah to Priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Psalm cx. 4) of necessity carries with it the supersession of the Aaronic priesthood together with the Law and the Covenant, with which that priesthood stood in indissoluble historical relation.

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he returned from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to whom

¹ *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 149 f.

Abraham on his part apportioned a tenth of everything, is first, as the translation of his name shows, king of righteousness, and then king of Salem, which means king of peace. He has no father, no mother, no genealogy: he has neither a beginning to his days, nor an end to his life, but, (herein) resembling the Son of God, he continues as a priest for ever (vii. 1-3).

The starting-point of the Christian writer is, of course, Psalm cx. 4, but in order to develop the mystical overtones of the declaration in that Messianic Psalm he goes back to the Melchizedek-passage in Genesis xiv. 18-20, and constructs a *midrash* upon it. The Genesis-narrative recorded simply that, after Abraham's return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the confederate kings, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, met him with bread and wine, that he was priest of 'El 'Elyon (God Most High), that he blessed Abraham in the name of 'El 'Elyon and blessed 'El 'Elyon for the victory given to Abraham, and that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything. The writer to the Hebrews takes no account of the bread and wine which Melchizedek offered—an omission which we shall have occasion to notice at a later point—but mentions that Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God, that he blessed Abraham, and that Abraham gave him the tithe. For the rest, the writer takes advantage of the absence from the Genesis-narrative of all reference to Melchizedek's parentage—a thing unusual in Semitic records—as well as to his birth and death, and presents the king of Salem as without father or mother or genealogy, and as having no beginning to his days or end to his life. By this exegetical *tour de force* he succeeds in differentiating Melchizedek's type of priesthood from the Aaronic, which depended

on genealogy and succession and was subject to mortality. At the same time he contrives to throw over Melchizedek an *aura* of mystery by which the priest of Salem becomes a symbol of the heavenly or eternal priesthood of Christ. The statement, however, that Melchizedek was in this matter 'assimilated to the Son of God' should be limited, in its range of application, to the one particular point that he 'remains a priest for ever', that is, he has no successor. If we press the analogy further, we get into theological difficulties, as the history of patristic exegesis shows.¹

In the succeeding passage (vii. 4-10) the dignity of Melchizedek is brought out by the fact that he even tithed Abraham. He blessed Abraham, the bearer of the divine promise, and 'incontrovertibly it is the less who is blessed by the greater'. In addition, when he tithed Abraham, he who had himself no place in the Levitical line was already, in effect, tithing Levi, Abraham's unborn descendant. The sons of Levi, the legal receivers of the tithe in Israel, who are 'mortal men', were thus placed in subordination to a priest of whom it is deponed (Psalm cx. 4) that 'he lives'.

Why should the writer labour points like these, unless he were writing to some over whom the official ordinances of Judaism, if not the hierarchy, still cast a spell?

Now, if perfection had been possible through the Levitical priesthood—it is on the basis of that priesthood that the people had been given the Law—what further need was there for another priest to arise 'after the order of Melchizedek', instead of being described as after the order of Aaron? For, when the priesthood is

¹ For this history see the interesting and instructive note of Dr. Moffatt, *Commentary*, p. 93.

altered, there necessarily occurs an alteration of the Law as well. Well, He of whom these things are spoken has had His lineage from another tribe from which no one has ever acceded to the altar. It is quite plain that our Lord has arisen out of Judah, and Moses has not said a word about priests with reference to that tribe. And the evidence becomes more transparent still when that other priest arises after 'the likeness of Melchizedek', as one who has become priest, not by the law of a physical requirement, but in virtue of an indissoluble life. The witness which is borne to Him is, 'Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek'. Here comes in the abrogation of an earlier ordinance on account of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law brought nothing to perfection), and the introduction of a superior hope, through which we draw near to God (vii. 11-19).

We have now the central pivotal idea on which the great thematic argument of the writer turns, so far as it concerns the authority of Jesus Christ in revealed religion. The new priesthood implies that the old Law and, as we shall see, the Old Covenant are abrogated. And here, especially in the two closing verses of the section, the parallelism of the writer's theology and St. Paul's becomes exceedingly close. St. Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews arrive at the same conclusion, namely, that the Law is superseded and abrogated through Christ, but they come to it by different roads. St. Paul's argument is an ellipse having two focal centres: (a) the promise of God to Abraham came before the Law of Moses, and was not annulled by the Law (Galatians iii. 17); (b) if the Law had had the power to communicate life, rightness with God would have come to us through it (Galatians iii. 21). The argument of Hebrews, in turn, has as focal centres

these: (a) the higher priesthood of Melchizedek was announced to Abraham before the Levitical priesthood existed, and its 'order' is not cancelled by the latter; (b) if 'perfection', the complete facilitation of our approach to God, had been possible through the Levitical priesthood, no other priest, such as the one predicted in Psalm cx. 4, would have arisen. In St. Paul the abrogation of the Law as a source of rightness with God implicitly carries the fall of the cultus with it. In Hebrews the supersession of the cultus explicitly involves the repeal of the Law. The Epistle thus supplements the Pauline argument at a point which St. Paul had left untouched, but which was of very great importance and interest to the world-mission. For who shall say that a less urgent practical necessity dictated the course of this writer's 'word of exhortation' to his Roman readers than dictated the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians?

There is indeed a difference, here as elsewhere, in the attitudes of St. Paul and the author of Hebrews to the past. St. Paul cannot think of Christ without having in mind the paradoxical relation in which the Christian salvation stands to Jewish expectation: a crucified Messiah is to the Jews a *skandalon*! The writer to the Hebrews, on the other hand, cannot get away from the positive relation in which the Jewish system of religion stands to Jesus Christ. There is no intellectual *skandalon* in his doctrine, but only a moral one; Christ suffered for us 'without the gate'! Yet for Hebrews, as well as for St. Paul, the Jewish past is a *past*. We have entered through Jesus into a higher order of grace than was made known in Judaism. The difference in the thought of the two writers may be put thus: while St. Paul gets in Christianity what Judaism

could not give, the writer to the Hebrews sees himself pointed forward in Judaism to the supernal reality of the grace revealed in Christ, a grace foreshadowed, but only foreshadowed, in the older religion.

We seem, then, to penetrate by the aid of the Epistle to the Hebrews to a stage or phase in the evolution of the early world-mission when at one centre certainly, at other centres very probably, Judaism in its ritual aspect still exercised some kind of spell over the minds of a section of the Christian society.¹ It is perhaps with this fact in mind that the writer to the Hebrews emphasises as the supreme characteristic of Christ's office that He is Priest 'not by the law of a physical commandment, but in virtue of an indissoluble life'. He is appealing here to the Resurrection. Just as St. Paul cannot think of faith except as faith in the God of the Resurrection,² so for the writer to the Hebrews Jesus is *Priest of the Resurrection* and the inaugurator of a 'better' hope by which we draw near to God. To this the section vii. 20-25 adds only a number of details, and calls for no comment, except as concerns the moving touch in verse 25, that the Saviour's indissoluble life is given to intercession for those who through Him draw near to God. 'The function of intercession in heaven for the People', says Dr. Moffatt, 'which originally was the prerogative of Michael, the angelic guardian of Israel, or generally of angels, is thus transferred to Jesus, to One who is no mere angel, but who has sacrificed Himself for the People.'³

Such was the High-Priest suited to our need, holy, innocent, spotless, placed in a different class from sinful

¹ See above, Chapter II, pp. 42 ff.

² See especially Romans iv. 19-25, x. 8-9.

³ *Commentary* on vii. 25. See same work, p. xxxix and note on i. 14. Cf. also p. 51 above.

men, and now made higher than the heavens. He does not need, from day to day, to offer sacrifices, as the high-priests did, first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He has done this once for all by the offering of Himself. For whereas the Law appoints as high-priests men beset with weakness, the word of the Oath, which came after the Law (Psalm cx. 4), appoints a Son who has been perfected for ever (vii. 26-28).

Jesus comes to us from the side of God, but in His perfect holiness of life, character, and function He is the Priest, the Mediator with God, whom our need requires. If it 'befitted' God to make the Hero-prince of our salvation perfect through sufferings (ii. 10), it 'befitted' Jesus as our Priest to make to God the perfect offering of His life. The qualities here attributed to Jesus are not to be understood as passive or negative, but positive and dynamic. They are not merely light but fire. 'In a class apart from sinners' must be taken in this sense, as indicating the completeness of the Saviour's vicarious sacrifice for men. The 'Once-for-allness' of the offering goes with the utter completeness of it. And with this reference to the Saviour's Oblation the writer passes to a new stage of his argument and to a higher plane.

PSALM CX

The survey we have now concluded will have made plain the extent to which the Epistle to the Hebrews is dominated by one great Old Testament oracle—Psalm cx. Here, in verses 1 and 4 combined, we have, as far as Old Testament prophecy can provide it, the charter-document of the writer's Christology, and for him the provision is absolute. Here is *the word of the*

Oath, which, pointing to the advent of the 'better hope through which we draw near to God' (vii. 19-22), announces the Eternal Order which supersedes the Law (vii. 28). Here is also an integral part of the primary Christian *confession* (iii. 1, iv. 14). In view of the frequency with which this Psalm appears and re-appears in Hebrews, like the sun's light seen through trees, it is idle to put down the doctrine of Christ's eternal High-Priesthood to 'a flash of inspiration' on the part of the writer, or to 'a gnosis' to which he has come, an ingenious mental exercise of the order of Philo's speculations on the Logos, a Biblical student's lucubrations on the Old Testament hierarchy. The truth for him was written on the sky. The 110th Psalm exercised a great influence on the primitive Christian mind, and verse 4 was a part of that Psalm.

A generation or two ago, it was customary in certain quarters to connect this King-Priest Psalm with Maccabean times, and even to see in it an ode in celebration of the institution of Simon Maccabeus or his successor, John Hyrcanus, in the dual office of Jewish prince and chief priest. That wave of confidence has passed—it was indeed difficult to account for the entrance of Melchizedek into the Psalm on this hypothesis—and today there is a readier disposition to put the Psalm back to the times of the Israelite monarchy, and to include it in the group of Royal or Enthronement Psalms (ii., xlv. and others) which played a part in some festival-ritual of the Hebrew period. The general thought inspiring these Psalms is that, while God is enthroned over Israel, David or the king of Israel for the time being is His vice-gerent. As for the Melchizedek feature in Psalm cx., it may be suggested that it had its root in a tradition going back in Israel to

the time of David's capture of Zion from the Jebusites (2 Samuel v. 4-10), when the Hebrew prince succeeded to prerogatives, political and religious, which had appertained—compare Genesis xiv. 18—to the Jebusite sheikhs. On this hypothesis we should be able to explain the interest which led to the incorporation of the Melchizedek narrative in Genesis, and, in turn, to the ascription to the Messianic king in Israel of priesthood 'after the order of Melchizedek', that is to say, in succession to Melchizedek.

However that may be, the Psalm gives a very instructive portrayal of the powers and prestige, under God, of the king of Israel. There in succession we find the enthronement of the king as the representative of God and of God's righteous reign (verse 1), his investiture with the sceptre of power (verse 2), the acclaiming homage of his subjects (verse 3), the oath of God confirming him 'for ever' (i.e. with his successors) in the Melchizedek-priesthood in Zion, his victory over the kings and nations opposed to God (verses 5-6), and his refreshment from (providential? sacramental?) springs of life (verse 7).¹

There were undoubtedly, besides this Psalm, other influences which helped to set the stage for the development of the Christ-Priest conception in the mind of the writer to the Hebrews. The reader may here profitably consult Dr. Moffatt's treatment of the question in his *Commentary*.² On the one hand, Jewish apocalyptic literature of the second and first centuries before Christ had built up the conception of a heavenly world with a sanctuary and an altar, which formed the 'patterns' and were thought of as the originals of their earthly

¹ See A. Bentzen, *Messias* (1948), pp. 19 f.

² Introduction, pp. xlvi-xlix, etc.

counterparts. Dr. R. H. Charles refers to Exodus xxv. 9, 40 and Numbers viii. 4 as the Scriptural basis of this idea.¹ Later Judaism, however, did not include in the picture the conception of a heavenly Priest. It desecrated the temple and the altar not made with hands, but the priest's place was vacant. Judaism felt the need of the functions of heavenly intercession and expiation, but it assigned these functions to Michael and the angels.²

Philo, again, has much to say of the Logos as High-Priest, but it is with the Logos that his thought is really occupied, not with the Priest. The concrete figure of the Jewish hierarch is swallowed up in the abstractness of a philosophical idea. Philo finds support for his conception in a Pentateuchal passage: 'And there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he (the high-priest) goes in to make atonement in the holy place' (Leviticus xvi. 17). The Septuagint version, which Philo follows, runs: 'When the high-priest goes into the holy of holies, there shall be no man.' This is read by Philo as meaning that the high-priest in his atonement-making function is not 'man'; he is 'an intermediate nature' between man and God.³ It is plain that Philo's high-priest is here drawn into the circle of abstract conceptions constituting the nature of the Logos. The Alexandrian theologian, again, has very little to say about Melchizedek. The latter he describes as a 'priest-logos, who has as his portion Him who is'.⁴ He is 'one who has attained to a priesthood self-schooled and self-taught'.⁵ The high-priest, upon a really scientific view directed to the hidden meaning of things,

¹ *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, p. 33.

² See above, pp. 51 and 116.

³ *De Somniis*, II. 28.

⁴ *Leg. Alleg.*, III. 82.

⁵ *De Congressu*, 99.

is, he says, 'not man, but divine Logos'.¹ It can hardly be said, therefore, that Philo stands very directly in the line from which the Christology of Hebrews is descended. In its form the thought of the writer of Hebrews is derived from Psalm cx.: in its matter it derives entirely from the passionate, wholly vicarious life and death of Jesus the Messiah.

¹ *De Fuga*, 108.