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THE TEACHING OF JESUS



PHILIPP · BACHMANN ·

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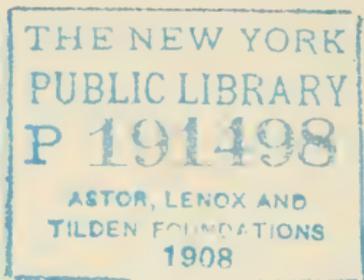
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I

THE QUESTION

In times of old Israel was fruitful in religious vitality. Holy seers and singers, pious women, God-inspired heroes formed the living power of its history. The whole Israelitish nationality was governed by the thought of God—early it willingly suffered to be impregnated by it; and early again it was unwillingly subdued by it. But the religious life in mutual conditionality was here most intimately connected with the life of the nation. At decisive turns of national and political development piety and religious belief are therefore also in the most vital commotion. As a matter of course centuries of rest and relaxation follow. The religious power without always becoming wholly extinct, loses nevertheless some of its fervent immediateness, some of its former inexhaustible depth. Thus changed, ebb and flow, in Israel's religious development. The tide is the hour of living production. From hidden sources come new benefits. Who-

ever draws from them, brings fresh life. The ebb brings new tasks; what the tide brought up, it collects, preserves, works up. In the place of production comes reproduction; the new is conserved, finally it becomes old, being long possessed, and the times gradually become ripe for the prophet, for the genius, who is to lift himself up and the times with him to a new development.

Jesus descended from Israel's soil. One can hardly think too realistically of this, how much he was inwardly connected with the religious peculiarity of his people and their laws of development. He grew up under the influence of the ancient, sacred authorities of his people, the Scripture, the cult, the entire religious order of life and mode of thinking. These influences were especially strong about him. For according to its general nature the time of Jesus belonged on the whole to the more conservative and reproductive periods of Israel's history of religion. The synagogues were above all the places where the religious life of the Jews was moulded and fostered; in the synagogue, however, ruled the scribe and he was the keeper of tradition. No public,

or any paid office gave him so much influence. The scribes were in themselves private persons like others; not a few of them made their living by the work of their hands. But they differed from others by their theological professional training. They devoted close study to the Holy Scripture. They understood, what the common man in the time of Jesus did not understand, the Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament; and through these scribes he was obliged to have the Scripture, which he wished to hear, translated into the Aramaic vernacular. The religious lectures in the schools were not exclusively by them, yet for the most part this instruction was in their hands. On the basis of the Old Testament law they made the law for the time being. As spiritual guides they often came into very close relationship with the individual. Without their help he was unable to apply conscientiously to the different conditions of life the intricate injunctions of the law and the "traditions of the elders." Those of Israel's youth who were mentally aspiring, attended their lectures. Thus they had the opportunity to exercise an influence in all direc-

tions. And they exercised it throughout in the sense of a strict obedience toward that which in religious matters was considered by the fathers in virtue of the Scripture as lawful and as law. The light and shade of their activity came from their most peculiar method. True, they had to succumb to the movements with which Judaism in general had to submit in religious matters since the extinction of the prophetic spirit; but they also helped at the same time that such movements appeared as the highest and only authority. Though they presented something new in their treatment, it appeared as ancient and demanded respect. Thus the time when Jesus appeared, was under the sign of the rule of the *old*. Jesus also worked in the manner of a scribe. He taught in the schools from the Scripture, gave pastoral advice as to good and evil; and gathered a circle of studious hearers around him. As a result he was also honored with the title of the scribes, "Rabbi." He was called by the people "Master" (Mark 5. 35; Luke 17. 13); "Rabbi" by his disciples (Mark 4. 38; John 11. 8) and even by the members of the body of the scribes

(Matt. 8. 19; 12. 38; Luke 11. 45; John 3. 2). Jesus did not object to this address (see Matt. 19. 16-19); he even found it in harmony with his character (John 13. 13; Matt. 23. 8).

Thus with many traits of his appearance he could be classified with that which existed, and it was his own expressed intention to let alone the venerable, ancient foundations of the whole. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets" (Matt. 5. 17). Yet, the picture of Jesus did not fully and always fit in that setting. The scribes themselves did not find him up to the mark; because he was not educated according to their rules; he was only a self-taught person (John 7. 15). His teaching had not the traditional origin; and it lacked also the traditional manner. How could he, who had not the stamp of the school, be at home in mere traditions? Jesus did not attend the lectures of the rabbis, which necessarily means at the same time—by all connection with the old—that he had nevertheless and from the beginning in himself something that was independent, fresh, and immediate. When he stepped forth

from his retirement, the people recognized his influence in the sentiment: "He teaches as one having authority and not as our scribes" (Matt. 7. 29). What *new doctrine* is this? (Mark 1. 27.) Such recognition of the new, as it did not exist before, referred not immediately and altogether to the word of this scribe, but to the deeds accompanying his word; "for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1. 27). But it concerned also his word. It was felt that this teacher needed no authority such as the schools conferred through its learning which was obtained and preserved through centuries. By a power immediately belonging to himself he secured for his word a place in human hearts.

Wherein did this power consist? It was the power of his independent personality; but it was also the peculiar character of his preaching, which, because convincing, earnestly aroused the heart and conscience. He not only spoke as one differing from those whom they usually heard, but he also spoke something different from what they usually heard, differing so much in all this that occasionally Jesus had to emphasize the great

contrast between the authoritative old and the freshly flowing new: "No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment, else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse" (Mark 2. 21).

The nature of the future work of his disciples Jesus comprised once in the rule: "Every scribe which is instructed into the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things new and old*" (Matt. 13. 52). Things new and old; this means here in the widest sense—authoritative and personal, traditional and newly received, acquired and experienced, common and individual. But Jesus himself was such a scribe instructed into the kingdom of heaven, the highest among all, the most faithful to tradition and at the same time the most productive, the end and the beginning in one. Thus he carried in his inward treasure things old, which he had from others and shared with others, and things new, which originally and solely belonged to him. The clear question then is: Where does the independence of Jesus begin?

What is the New, which separates him from his surroundings? We seek it in his *teaching*. But is not this a mistake from the start? Does not the productive power of Jesus consist in his personality, in the carrying out of a personal life filled by God with greatness and purity and fire? Is not this more important and more original than the ideas and thoughts which filled him? The present time has a special eye for this side of the life of Jesus. But it is in danger of running into opposition with reality by tearing asunder the teaching and the person of Jesus. In opposition to simple historical reality, we repeat, for those first disciples who lived entirely in the immediate contemplation of the personality of Jesus, felt themselves bound to him because they had to confess: "Thou hast the words of Eternal Life" (John 6. 68); and Jesus himself bound with all emphasis to his sayings those who wished to be his disciples and through him raised to salvation (Matt. 7. 24). His word is the seed of the kingdom of heaven (Mark 4. 14), for it is spirit and life and the power of sanctification (John 6. 63; 17. 17). But even with a gen-

eral psychological reality, that separation and opposition does not agree; for a personal life, just as it is purified, harmonious and independent in itself, has not its roots outside of the thoughts, cognitions, ideas of man, but in them, though not exclusively in them. And this applies to Jesus in a special degree. To be sure, his word came entirely from the depths of his life purely and strictly grounded in God; but the manifold fullness of his personality, all his humility and all his courage, grew up also in the truth which filled him and revealed to him God, himself and the kingdom of God. His whole soul lived in the inner word with which he apprehended this, and in the outer word, in which he spoke of it. His speech is the revelation-side of his nature; and whoever approached him, must take him at his word. When therefore, the question is raised, What is the new in Jesus, we are permitted to seek it, not merely naturally, but first of all in his *teaching*. Newton revealed the laws of gravitation; Kant understood the conscience as the categorical imperative of pure duty; Paul presented the idea of justification by faith—but *what new thing did Jesus teach us?*

II

THE INSUFFICIENT ANSWER

Belief in the one living God was for a long time the peculiar distinction of Judaism above other nations. It expressed this belief in such form that it asserted a unique communion-relation between God and itself. Even the history of the first Christian church shows that it was very hard for many a born Jew to divest himself of the idea that one must be a Jew in order to be assured of the goodness of God. Christianity has fundamentally overcome this natural barrier of religion. On this account it is sometimes asserted that the originality of its founder consisted in this, that he taught that God is the shield and keeper not of one people but of all men; with him God is no respecter of persons. In those circles in which scientific mode of speculation is preached, this conception is laid aside, especially when it imagines that the significance of Jesus is created by that thought. But, as seems to be, it has its great after-effects elsewhere. It is

quite natural. Christian belief in God grew out of the Jewish; but of the differences between the two, the universalist idea of the Christian is most obvious. Judaism was a national religion. Christianity is a world religion. It must therefore be that its founder who effected this progress, is a historical character. One thing also is undoubtedly correct in this conception: From Christ, and from no other did early Christianity receive courage to offer itself to the heathen world, to the cultured and the barbarous. Paul is indeed an organ, even the chiefest of all for this progress, but he was not its author. But the ruling New doctrine, which Jesus taught, is not expressed by that thought. True, Jesus taught that the world is the field in which God soweth his seed of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13. 38); he prophesied that the kingdom of God should be taken from the Jews and be given to the Gentiles (Matt. 21. 43; 8. 11-19). But the idea of an international religious communion as the ideal of the future, is already met with in the Old Testament (Isa. 25. 6; 49. 6; 60. 3; Micah 4. 1 seq.; Zeph. 3. 9; Hag. 2. 6, 9; Zech. 2. 11); it is not even wholly

foreign to rabbinic Judaism, and has on the other hand in the teaching of Jesus so little of the strain, that in the conflict between Jesus and Judaism, it only coöperated in so far as it included the rejection of Israel, that is, its exclusion from the world-embracing peace of God. Inaccurate observation could in our days even lead to the result that universalism was entirely foreign to Jesus; that it is far away from forming the nucleus of his teaching.

The mistake with which we had thus far to deal has its origin, not so much in certain facts from the life-picture of Jesus, as in uncertain expressions, which his personality brings to bear upon us. From a mistaken minimizing of some real traces of his life, there arose in the period of the *Aufklärung* or "illumination" and still arises a different conception of the new teaching which he brought. Again and again it must be emphasized that Jesus closely connected religion with morality. He did it in the sense that no piety is of any value which is lacking in good works. Most keenly did Jesus express this principle when, on the one hand he had to deal with the conflict between the sacred

ceremonies in the cult concerning the hand and mouth, and on the other the simple every-day work of love. He denied to the former all worth and considered only the good deed. The praise of the Samaritan who has no part in the sacred sacrificial cult of Israel, but saves him that fell among the thieves, is at the same time a condemnation of the priest, who had behind him a holy day's work in "the service of God," but refuses to help the distressed (Luke 10. 20-29). To do good sanctifies the Sabbath rather than strict ritual (Matt. 12. 7). Not the cry, "Lord, Lord" leads into the kingdom of heaven, but the exercise of love, meekness, mercy, peace (Matt. 7. 21).

In all this imperishable truths are given to us. But whoever infers from this subordination of the cultic work to the good deed, that Jesus merged the religious in the moral, and that this is his real merit, obtains a perfect caricature of him. Those ceremonies were a mere manifestation, the mere garb of religiousness. Criticism on such can therefore also take place in the interest of a purification of religion instead of becoming an argument for that conception.

It is not even correct to say, that according to Jesus the promotion of the morally good in the world is the proper participation in the kingdom of God. For, in the first place, Jesus is a preacher of religious certainty; every moral ideal which he teaches, is derived from that. Good is that which is done in imitation of God, evincing religious belief in him, in working out a deep sense of divine adoption (Matt. 5. 48). Had Jesus taught as the *Aufklärung* or "illumination" often imagined, had he really eliminated the mystic, condemned the withdrawal of piety to monastic retreats and put the true love to man, or even the service of culture in the forefront, certainly, in the surroundings in which he lived and in the entire historical movement into which he entered, this were something perfectly new, something unheard of, and our questions were soon answered. But the real Jesus has not the least to do with the notion that beneficence not prayer is the characteristic of the true Christian fashioned after Jesus.

Thus far we have swung round the uttermost circle beyond which are notions which must be rejected from the start, provided

one will come to the point. We are not the only ones who reject them; any competent judge will do so. But within that circle there is still room enough for very different views; and the present time is the least unanimous concerning what propositions shall be agreed upon. Yea, its whole inner confusion is connected with this, that in the question—what new teaching has Jesus given to the world—it cannot obtain a uniform point of view.

In his *Wesen der Religion* (1903) Bousset described the position of Jesus within the religious historical development of humanity and especially of Israel. According to him Jesus freed religion from the national and ceremonial, but also from belief in the letter—not by violent destruction of the old, not by tenet and theories, but by unchaining a new spirit of inwardness and personality. His piety embraced a less as against the sum of a thousand single deeds and single acts, with which Judaism had connected the worship of God; which by being simpler, was at the same time deeper. Such piety rests on the fear of the almighty God; but from it rises victorious trust in

God as the Father, Creator, Upholder and Preserver of our higher spiritually personal existence, the gracious friend of sinners; and it exhausts itself in moral fruitfulness, which comes from the expectation of judgment before the eternal Judge. Moral, redeeming religion—to state it in the full clearness and simplicity of its nature—that is the originality of the preaching of Jesus. In its center “stands belief in the deliverance and unchaining of the good will through the forgiveness of sins.”¹ Quite a number of recent descriptions of the teaching and person of Jesus move in a like sphere of thought. Otto praises Jesus of Nazareth as the awakener of inward piety and the discoverer of moral personality.² Julicher teaches that Jesus gave to the world a new ideal of morality; unselfish love, and a new ideal of piety, joyous belief in the Father in heaven.³ Harnack also belongs here.⁴ He distinguishes—wholly in the sense of our inquiry on the preaching and ideas of Jesus—things which he had in common with his

¹ Bousset, *Jesus*, 1904, p. 79.

² *Leben und Werken Jesu*, 1905.

³ *Das Messianische Selbstbewusstsein Jesus*, 1903.

⁴ *Wesen des Christenthums*, 1900, p. 33 seq.

contemporaries, and things which were peculiar to him. The latter are the really valuable in him. And it is in this that by divesting himself of everything particular and legal, he led men to God and taught them to live in him as their Father; to bring about in this communion of their soul with God the theocracy; to lift themselves up to inner strength and a world-overcoming independence in the certainty of the forgiveness of sins; to perceive in life and death the hand of the living God and his providence; to make humility before God the source of everything good in pure love to men. In his new knowledge of God, which did not exist before, consists the peculiar life-content, which Jesus asserts of himself under the idea of divine Sonship.

Less easily than those mentioned above, Pfleiderer gets over the fact that Jesus enriched his self-consciousness with the full realization of ideas of his Messiahship and as judge of the world. But he also sees the real importance of the person of Jesus in this, that he proclaimed the ideal of the government of God¹ in the hearts of his chil-

¹This was also the ever recurring idea of Renan.—EDITOR.

dren and in the fellowship of his Kingdom.¹ The idea of perfect spiritually moral religion is accordingly the new teaching. But this in so far as it advanced to clearness and power was an anticipation and impulse already dormant in humanity in general.²

What have all these conceptions in common? Humanity was a long time already on the way seeking God; but Jesus discovered him for humanity and expressed in his teaching that which he found, whom he found. By that he revealed to humanity what genuine belief in God is and what true love is; showed it in its full purity and gave it to humanity for an everlasting possession. He is accordingly that organ through which humanity made the most decisive advance in the development of its relation to God, or, more correctly, obtained the height of perfection. The new which Jesus brought lies therefore in the sphere of the subjective or inner conditionality of humanity. It thereby remains though one closes not his eyes to the discernment that all advances of his-

¹ Die Entstehung der Christenthums, 1905, p. 61 seq.

² Das Christusbild des urchristlichen Glaubens in religionsgeschichtlichen Beleuchtung, 1903.

tory, and therefore all that is effected by Jesus, took place under the inspiration of a divine life.

It is true, that in Jesus Christ the revelation of God consummated itself, but this revelation is the awakening of perfect piety of heart in man. With these fundamental ideas the discussed conception comes forth from the isolation in which we have thus far considered it, as one diffused at present, and to the final point of a long series of opinions concerning Jesus which, in spite of all variety, agree in this, that the distinguishing mark of Jesus relating to his teaching, is comprised in the doctrine of the purification of the moral or religious idea of humanity. Thus Schleiermacher measured the perfection of the teaching of Jesus by this, that he actively expressed in it his original and creative divine consciousness with the intention that it should be appropriated by men.¹ There exists a chasm between Schleiermacher's theology and that of old "illumination." He knew better than this, and the newest theology following his traces knows how to appreciate the creative power

¹ *Der Christliche Glaube*, p. 103.

which emanates from Jesus; also to seek religion not in correct ideas of the human mind *about* God, but in hearts moved by the spirit of God, the spirit of love. Nevertheless, there is something in common between him and the old illumination which bridges this chasm. It lies in the direction which engages us. For even the "illumination" of the eighteenth century recognized the importance of Jesus in this that he developed and transformed the religious possession of humanity. In his *Education of the Human Race* (p. 58) Lessing himself calls Christ the first trustworthy, practical teacher of the immortality of the soul. But in the main this is only an arbitrary limitation, a taking out of a single sentence from a comprehensive conception which Bretschneider thus expressed: "With reference to his teaching, Jesus retained the general religious teachings of the Old Testament and confirmed them; and changed and rejected only such statements which were hurtful to morality, or would prevent the essence of religion, especially the merit of sacrifices, of the many daily prayers, of Levitical purification, the burdensome ceremonial service, resting on

tradition, and the narrow, bigoted notion of the Jews, that God is their natural God who loves them only and hates all other nations. In the main he confirmed and purified the doctrine of God as Spirit, who is to be worshiped in spirit, as Father of all men; who wishes to bless all, give life to all; of his wise providence ruling all men; of immortality and moral retribution on this side and on the other side of the grave; and taught at the same time, a virtue which is to come from a pure source—the love to God and man and which is founded on the natural disposition of man, is able to develop the humane or, if one will, the divine in man without ascetic aberration.”¹ Finally—with all his opposition to the mere rationalism of the “illumination”—we must here also mention Herder. As he understands Christ he meant to fashion men of God, who from pure motives promoted the welfare of others and self-suffering ruled as kings in the kingdom of truth and goodness.²

Who could deny the truth in all this! Christendom will always insist that we must

¹ Handbuch der Dogmatik, ii, p. 153.

² Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte, xvii, introduction.

seek in the word of Jesus the norm for religious service in spirit and in truth, and it will never cease to derive from it living impulses in that direction. But we must not forget the question, whether the new which Jesus brought, is already described exhaustively, yea, whether in that which Jesus taught in that direction, something really and fundamentally new, is given at all. There is a method of consideration which the second form of this question, also, not only puts but at once denies. It is that of modern Judaism which strives after an ethical deepening of the religious life yet retains the connection with the ancestral faith. With a certain pride the boast is made that the religious development of Israel received no impression from Jesus of Nazareth; yea, that it did not even need it. The picture we are told which the New Testament gives of rabbinism which was contemporaneous with Jesus, is wrong and one-sided; this rabbinism has actually in itself quite sufficient forces of religious inwardness and civilization; to all the much-admired sayings of the Nazarene on the spirituality and simplicity of religion and a

religion of love parallels could be adduced from the Jewish ideas of that time and its literature. Finally this critique goes so far as to show that Jesus was not very original, yea, that in many respects he was a product of the overstrainings and doubtful aberrations of this inner-Jewish development; that he represents no new type at all."¹

The controversy concerns the contrast between Jesus and scribism, not Judaism in general. Alongside of scribism many religious movements existed in Judaism at that time. There was not wanting a subtilizing enlightenment, nor a popularly naïve distortion of religion to an empty externality, childlike, cherishing fantastic and fanatical hopes of the future. Over against this scribism was the theologically guarded and regulated religion. We know this religion from the vast literature of the Talmud and like productions. In them is deposited in bee-like manner all the additional religious matter, namely, the revelation of God in the

¹ The latest effort of such a proof on the Jewish side is by Dr. J. Eschelbacher, *Das Judentum und das Wesen des Christenthums* (Schriften der Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums), Berlin, 1905. [See also *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Article *Jesus*.—EDITOR.]

law and the prophets which rabbinism appropriated from the theological and religious movements in different centuries. From thence came the parallels between the words of Jesus and rabbinic statements referred to before, which are to refute the originality of Jesus. They certainly exist and are related to the linguistic form, to the way of forming ideas, to the thoughts themselves. But in not a few instances this concord loses its force, because the Jewish-rabbinical material for comparison is evidently of later origin than the word of Jesus. Thus, for example, surprising proofs from ancient Jewish prayers can indeed be collected for the Lord's Prayer; but the traces of their existence belong to the second century A.D. In other cases the individual statement in the mouth of the rabbi shows, at the first glance indeed, a very strong resemblance to the word of Jesus; but a closer examination perceives an essential difference of ethico-religious force between both.¹

¹ This refers, for example, to the word of rabbi Hillel (75 B.C.—10 A.D.): "What is hateful to thee, do not unto thy neighbor." Hillel is said to have called this "the whole law." This word is usually quoted as parallel to the word of Jesus in Matt. 7. 12. But what a difference!

But for our part we should not go so far as to deny every inner relation between Jesus and scribism where the originality is not entirely on the side of Jesus. Jesus during his early development must have lived so isolated, as in fact he did not, that he could not have heard and learned something from rabbinism which was found everywhere. And this would have been so void of the spirit that it could not otherwise but coin the gold committed to it in such alloy that of the original precious metal hardly a trace were to be perceived. Even the New Testament itself, which on the whole gives a very horrible picture of rabbinism, teaches us in this sense. In Nicodemus it certainly shows an inwardly disposed scribe (John 3. 1-9). The lawyer, also, of whom Luke 10. 25 speaks, was a rabbi. To the question of Jesus as to the way of salvation, he gives a clear answer and is praised by the Lord. Even in his severe address against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23), Jesus—for the time being

Hillel's rule says: Never do anything to thy neighbor, namely, nothing bad. Jesus said: Do always something to thy neighbor, but plainly good.

at least—considers their teaching as still being a guide to piety. All this is good, but the New Testament shows also something else. It shows that Jesus could well solve the theological problems of the rabbis (Matt. 22. 15-40), but that on the other hand, they had no understanding for his deep and deepest thoughts (Matt. 22. 41; John 3. 10). It shows that that very lawyer had no conception how to apply practically his beautiful knowledge (Luke 10. 29). It shows no less that scribism had lost the right estimate of essential and non-essential things (Matt. 23. 23). They had the law and the prophets; but under the hand of the scribes it was the consummation of the prophetic spirit which resulted at last only in deadening forms of intrinsic law, continually commented upon.

Extrabiblical sources confirm this view as to negative result. The exactness of the nature of true piety and morality was rendered coarse in rabbinism. In none of the scribes do we meet with a personality in which the religious idea, in its original purity and creative depth and in its directing energy, had been apprehended and expressed with such instructive power concerning the

emancipation and separation of the essential and non-essential, as in Jesus. There deep, sinking words form an exceptional phenomenon. In Jesus the expression of living belief in God and of love forms the rule, the whole. To scribism appertained religious seriousness in a high degree; but its demeanor and teaching lacked cheerfulness and simplicity.

In the controversy before us we cannot but declare that Jesus is clearly distinguished from contemporaneous scribism and that he represents a new phenomenon. He is thus marked off first of all by the peculiar creative power of his personality. But as a matter of course, this peculiarity also shows itself in his teaching; and for this we need not seek long. We find it in the boundlessness with which he radiates love into all distances of humanity and into all depths of self-denial; in the inexorableness of moral energy with reference to his demands for a God-related disposition; in the certainty with which he binds the communion with God—not to religious intellectual refinement—but to child-like simplicity of the heart. The rabbis and he both spoke of the Father in heaven and of love to one's neighbor; but Jesus meant this

and that in an entirely different, in a more direct, sense than they did.

But with this result we are not yet at the end of our question. In the distance between Jesus and the scribes as representatives of the religious thought in Israel, there works a factor common to both. He and they were spiritually fed on the fruits of the inner history of the old covenant, the Old Testament. One can indeed inquire into the relation of Jesus to the rabbis by asking whether he did not intend to reduce religion free from all accessories to the simple, great characteristic features, which Israel's prophecy had stamped it. For matchless, indeed, in the whole history of the mental life of humanity is this phenomenon in the religious development of Israel. With quiet certainty, with all zeal against perversion and abuse, with instinctive power these heroes of the Holy Spirit rise and release the simple, clear, living ideal of sincerest fear of God, of pure, earnest morality from the multifariousness of transmitted customs, from superstitious distortion and wanton perversion. They know God as the mighty Lord, the everlasting friend, the merciful Father of Israel

(Isa. 63. 16), and they wait for a time when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, of this Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Every practice of the cult, ever so carefully done, is of no value to them; yea it is sin in their estimation, unless it is animated by living obedience to the holy will of God (Isa. 1. 10-17). With glad faith they bind the bond between the Lord, who dwells in the high and holy place, and those who are of a contrite and humble spirit (Isa. 57. 15). They praise the happiness of the people and of the individuals who have found their refuge in God's comfort and mercy (Isa. 12. 1-6; 40. 31). Kind love for the distressed and justice to all is in their eyes the ornament of the pious (Micah 6. 8). In a regeneration of the deepest character they see the salvation of the future (Jer. 31. 31; Ezek. 36. 26 seq.). If this is the peculiar greatness of the preaching of the prophets and, if, on the other hand, with the views of modern and older theologians before stated, the compass or contents of the teaching of Jesus is exhausted, the looked-for definition of the relation between Jesus and the scribes, now follows. His independence over against

them is rooted in this, that he was able to renew with sympathetic power, the prophetic, fundamental thoughts. This conclusion is certainly comprehensible.

But, from another direction, we get into greater trouble. Is not then the new which Jesus taught merely a renewal of the old? Wherein differs the teaching of Jesus as something new from the teaching of the prophets? If there exists no clear and worthy answer to that, the question is very pertinent whether we do not wrong those worthies of the old covenant by the sole prominence given to Jesus as the true seeker and knower of God? Jesus indeed absolves us from such a mistake; he asserted nothing less than the immense distance between himself and the prophets before him; for "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John," and "among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven [which Jesus announces] is greater than he" (Matt. II. 11, 13).

But wherein consists this greater, this new? The theologians, whose school we

have thus far attended, would presumably not approve of it, if we should say: the new consists in this, that Jesus, stronger by far than those prophets, yea, exclusively emphasized the relation of God *to the individual*. The prophets do not entirely rid themselves of a glance at the nation and the limitations connected with it. Jesus, however, awarded to each individual soul of man, in whatever body it was, an infinite value, by relating to that very individual God's purpose of salvation. According to this individualism, the sense of personality, were the real new things in the teaching of Jesus. But this boundary between Jesus and prophecy is in the first instance only valid in a limited degree. The Psalms, this poetical echo of the prophetic revelation of God, very clearly show that even in that Old Testament piety, the certainty of an immediate relation of the individual with God strongly existed, and Jesus also declared that the union of the pious in a congregation ever so little is also the place of a special work of God's work of grace and of himself (Matt. 18. 19).

Nevertheless there exists a perceptible difference here also between Jesus and the

prophets. But in the second place it is not wrongly referred to, that this difference has its basis in the different times. When the prophets spoke, Israel was a nation with a political present and future, a commonwealth; when Jesus spoke, it was a pre-eminently religious community. As a matter of course there the whole, here, however, the individual, came to the foreground. Such being the case, the new in Jesus is then not his most original work, but the form conditioned by outward circumstances which, for good or evil, his preaching must assume. Jesus could not possibly have so aroused the conscience of the Roman procurator, at least with reference to the religious and moral regulation of the life of the Jewish people, as the prophets once did the native kings. Thus his authority naturally turned to the individual. Whether this should be accounted to him as special merit may perhaps be doubtful. Yea, some have even pointed out that in this we may see a certain restriction with Jesus; quite different from him the prophets knew to assert the fear of God as the leaven of public life.

It is clear that on this way we do not get very far. On this account one can understand that many seek the solution in a fundamentally different direction. They deny that Jesus taught something very special and original; in the main they consider his teaching as mere renewal of the best prophetic thoughts. But nevertheless Jesus appears to them as new, as never before existing, creative, original in the highest sense. For no one like him has ever filled those thoughts with the vigor of life and converted that life into holy reality. Every chasm between thought and deed is overcome in him; not like ourselves did he have to toil up from contrasts to perfect God-inwardness; for ever and ever, and fully and wholly, it filled him with purity and power.

We are far from finding fault with this matter of fact. For to everyone who devoutly brings before his eyes the life-picture of Jesus in its real and full content, it has something humiliating and at the same time uplifting; it overcomes his heart. But the more seriously must we ask whether from the basis of the hitherto existing assumptions, the retreat to this last position can really be

accomplished without defeat. For thus far we have worked from that point of view of consideration which the "modern," "liberal," "negative," or with whatever more or less appropriate name it may be called, this very theology assigns to us. It teaches us to seek out in Jesus—in his word or in his person—the, for the first time, perfect realization of complete religion. We have already examined above whether and in how far, in face of certain objections on the part of the Jews, this point of view can be asserted, as if the religious *thought* which Jesus expressed were nothing *original*. But we must now remember another, more serious, objection from that quarter. Modern Jewish criticism on Jesus and his relation to rabbinism, that is, on the life-picture which the most recent Protestant theology sketches of Jesus, expresses itself thus: "The Nazarene was in the beginning impregnated by the serious and pure thoughts of God, as rabbinism also represented them; but gradually his inner consciousness became disturbed; he adopted the Messiah-idea; got into fanciful expectation of the future, and the more Judaism withdrew from him on that account the

more he got himself into an inner excitement, that he forgot the differences between God and man and assigned to himself a place and work at the right hand of God." It is consequently denied that Jesus was able to retain in himself the purity and depth of the God-idea to the end; his Messianic claim is explained as a darkening, which refers to his person as well as to his teaching; he thereby gave cause for the Christ-belief with all its sequences. In short, Jesus denotes in reality, in the very peculiarity of his personal demeanor, a painful obscuring of the pure knowledge of God. The new in him is, therefore, alas! something little pleasing.

Thus Jewish criticism. Can modern theology resist it for its conception? *We must answer this question with all emphasis and seriousness in the negative.* This theology also knows and cannot deny, that Jesus ascribes to himself a very peculiar position in the kingdom of God; that he spoke of his resurrection and coming again in glory; that he made the claim once to judge the world. It knows his word: "I am—namely Christ, the Son of the Blessed—and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of

power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14. 62). By way of criticism it does indeed what it can to minimize the sum total of the testimony of Jesus in this respect; but it fails to eradicate it radically. And why does it wish to be released from that testimony? I believe that none of the theologians mentioned before, and many others beside them, will or can seriously complain when we answer: Because they are convinced that that claim of Jesus is not opposed by a corresponding reality. According to their conception Jesus is historically acting in a very quick and fruitful manner, more fruitful than any other hero of history, but he sits *not* in personal and unique activity on the right hand of God and he comes *not* to judge the world. What task is now before them? This: to explain how Jesus could arrive at that bold, strange idea concerning himself, without their troubling the purity and simplicity of his humanity and belief in God. But this problem is unsolvable and a certain feeling, the impossibility of solving it, has called forth efforts to explain the Messianic self-testimony of Jesus in general as a later fiction. One might almost

say with bitter jest, that on no point is that modern theology so harmonious as on this, how the Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus is to be understood. We hear it on all sides; this consciousness was a form in which Jesus had to imagine himself, because no other idea existed in Israel by means of which he could make intelligible to himself and others his unique calling—to be teacher and representative of a perfect religion; but when fate was threatening and held out prospects of his own personal destruction, he clung to the Messianic hope, and, by its application to himself, he stamped the conviction that his word and his activity are imperishable. In short, the conviction of the divinity of his *cause*, he coupled with the auxiliary notion of the divinity of his person. That is the kernel, this is the shell; that the lasting essence, this the perishable form; that the world-receiving truth, this the fatal error of Jesus. Well, let it be so; but then the harmlessness with which many understand this Jesus is entirely inexcusable. How? Jesus had to take to his help that Messianic notion, in order to proclaim the greatness of his cause. And why? Because it existed in

Israel? But Jesus worked out a very different Messianic hope from that which existed in Israel; one so widely antagonistic, that he was condemned to death by the Jews because of this opposition and for no other reason. So little familiar was this Messiah-picture at that time in the sphere in which Jesus moved, that not even the God-enlightened prophet, John the Baptist, could accommodate himself to it without victory over himself. And could Jesus, only in this way, bring the conviction of his unique calling into a certain form of thought? But he had for this conviction the setting of propheticism—a clear, grand, living phenomenon—which would have been sufficient for his self-characterization, if his calling needed this, to express the essence of the perfect fear of God and the love of God. How? Must he put *himself* by the side of God, to assert *his word* as God's word? But in truth it belongs already to the foundations of every mental greatness of a man, that he is able to distinguish between person and object. Religion, however, has directly a proof of its genuineness in that the more it receives of God, and the higher the calling with

which it is entrusted, the more earnestly and surely and strictly does it experience the difference between God's greatness and man's lowliness. Beyond these simple facts none of those modern efforts can bring us to explain the Messianic self-consciousness of Jesus, no matter how much it may seem to summon ever so great psychological skill and sensitiveness. This Jesus had rather to be delivered from himself, and modern theology has finally rendered him this perfect service. Heretofore we restricted ourselves into seeking the new in Jesus of Nazareth in the full purity and simplicity of his personal life-contents, in order not to suffer him to become a mere disciple of the prophets; this road is now impassable for us.

Consequently the matter now stands thus: We started from a certain supposition and assumed hypothetically, that the new in Jesus consisted in this or was limited to this; that he developed religion to perfect inwardness, truth and morality. We endeavored to uphold this supposition against objections which were raised this way or that way; but every path which we took for this purpose finally led us into the dark. One cannot

understand Jesus as a great and new phenomenon in itself, still less as the center of the history of religion, so long as one accepts another view of his historical activity than that expressed in the alleged supposition. And yet Jesus himself was definitely separated from everything which went before him and from everything which follows him. Wherein then lies the new doctrine which he taught?

III

THE TRUE ANSWER

What did Jesus really teach? "The time is, fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1. 15; Matt. 4. 17). For the understanding of this word one must cling to the idea "kingdom of God," and to define its content according to the sense of Jesus in contradistinction to the common Jewish notions thereof. This work is important and is remunerative. But it must also not be overlooked that in his preaching, when speaking of the kingdom of God, Jesus does not come forth as with a perfectly new matter, but he supposes in his hearers an idea and elementary notion thereof. It may be that the idea needed correction, but it nevertheless existed. The emphasis therefore, in that scripture sentence is not at all on the object of the statement, but on the statement itself: "*at hand*" is the kingdom of God. With much emphasis this very statement runs through

the entire preaching of Jesus. It appears in the height of his activity; with it he sends his disciples into the cities and villages of the Jews (Matt. 10. 7). Its sound is heard in the solemn hours of the last days of Jesus, and becomes a comfort and blissful hope (Luke 21. 31). Certainly "at hand" by no means denotes plainly it is here. It denotes as much as "come nigh." And this does not preclude the petition for its real and final coming (Matt. 6. 10). This "being near" can even protract itself and offer yet the opportunity to exercise one's self in expectation and longing. And yet it is a word of very great weight, this "it is at hand." For it says, "that the kingdom of God"—who knows how long and how far it has been distant from Israel, that it is now in motion and has now overcome this distance, so much so that it is immediately before the door; that a thin covering has only to fall off and its full glory be seen in the midst of the world. Yea, the thought can increase to the immediate certainty, that the kingdom of God is here; that it broke in with force (Matt. 12. 28 and 11. 12, in which place it must be translated: the kingdom of heaven

sets in with force)—so energetically the notion of the decisive advancement of the kingdom of God is contained in that “at hand.” Is this now a new teaching? No. For *teaching* is something theoretical, a statement on conditions remaining the same, which are not yet fully perceived, or which are to be defined clearly, or appropriated by the older generation to the thought of the younger. That word denotes nothing of the kind. That sentence is a statement that in the great world of realities, of the highest realities, something has changed; something new, great, glorious has come to pass and comes to pass. This is no teaching, but a message. *A new message of the great deeds of God—this is the new in the teaching of Jesus.* That on the strength of that, men may and must change, deepen, familiarize their knowledge of God; that they may have to transform and purify their moral conceptions in accordance with the new knowledge, all this to be sure is necessarily associated with it.

On this account Jesus adds also to the message the appeal: “Repent,” that is, change your disposition and believe the gos-

pel. But Jesus would have never made these new demands had he not been in a position to give them a living relation to the *new message*, which fell from his lips. Hence all those difficulties which we dealt with above vanish because we had adopted a supposition in which that word "is at hand" had not been fully appreciated. Now, however, the difference between Jesus and rabbinism becomes clear and great at the same time. The scribes had also spoken of the kingdom of God; in many respects they differed from Jesus, but this is not the most important; the most important was that they knew nothing of it and had nothing to say; that now, just now, this kingdom of God makes its beginning with power. Furthermore, Jesus also stands out clearly enough from the prophets. They spoke in general, at least not as yet, of a kingdom of God; but though the word was foreign to them, they nevertheless had in them a living hope of a future in which God would be present in Israel as helper. But it was only a hope, and Peter strikingly points out how they had to be satisfied to read in this who knows how distant a future (1 Pet. I. 10-12)! Jesus how-

ever comes forth and proclaims: "The time is fulfilled." Thus that simple observation frees us from serious difficulties which formerly seemed insuperable. And concerning the last and highest, the supernatural self-appreciation which Jesus bestowed upon himself—it may yet possibly clear up in its harmony with Jesus's purest humility and simplicity, when we consider a little closer this his new message.

"The kingdom of God is at hand." In our consideration we get the advantage over the perplexed question—what this kingdom is and what individual signs are contained in its idea, and how they adjust themselves, by drawing the simple inference, that in the kingdom of God, God himself exercises his active sovereign-presence. Where the kingdom of heaven is not, God is not, or, is at least not so present as he is in his kingdom. This is perhaps a bold thought but it is unavoidably contained in that sentence. Our idea of God and already also that of the Jews, could and certainly can surrender the thought of God not as present and efficient everywhere. But when we wish to think with Jesus, we must distinguish this omni-

presence of God from a special kind of his existence in the world. It consists in this that he is present not merely as Lord, ruler and preserver of life, but as Redeemer, Helper and miracle-worker. With rejoicing Israel knew itself from times of old, as the sphere of such special gracious activity of God, and Jesus fully confirmed this claim; for the God, of whom he speaks, he knows and affirms as the God of the forefathers of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in a sense in which he offered not himself as God to any other nation and their ancestors (Matt. 22. 32). Thus the world separates into two uneven parts; the large one when, to speak with Paul, God suffers the nations to walk in their own ways, not without leaving himself a witness (Acts 14. 16); and the smaller, when God puts in motion redeeming-forces of a new, incomprehensible kind. But the message of Jesus urges us farther on. For in this narrower sphere it places over against the present when God has drawn near, a past in which God, in spite of all, is still far off, relatively distant, and was only about to come near to Israel from such a distance. As concerns

space and time, the attitude of God toward his world differs; but the message of Jesus says that now and in Israel is the time and the place where this attitude of God expresses itself most peculiarly and vitally in its singular manner, that now the kingdom of God is at hand. Once more then: not what must change and become new in men in the depths of their minds, but that something changes and becomes new from God; this is the nucleus of the message of Jesus.

Thus far we have moved in very general statements concerning this remarkable new work in and of God. It is fascinating to follow the development of this new message in the preaching of Jesus. When Jesus preached in Nazareth, his native town, he gave as it were, a commentary to that message of the arrival of the kingdom of God. From the prophet Isaiah he read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath set me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord,"

and added, being himself moved by this powerful promise: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4. 18-21). This—"it is fulfilled"—springs from the like-energetic certainty to that of "is at hand." Thus that present nearness and presence of God also consists in this, that that which now takes place, or commences to take place, is that which was promised by the prophet. But can one *command* the blind that they see? No. Therefore it is also not the demand of a new human attitude, the longing of a self-deliverance with which God now comes to man. But God has decided now to do something on his part which he did not before; to perform great deliverance-deeds and works of healing on them that are bruised and miserable. In quite the same sense Jesus answered the doubting or urging John in the message of the deliverances which now take place and are to take place (Matt. 11. 5). This power of help is the violence with which the kingdom of heaven now advances (Matt. 11. 12). From this, that Jesus delivers those miserable demoniacs from their tormentors, every one can perceive that the kingdom of God is come

(Luke 11. 20). The kingdom of God is therefore the strong finger which God lifts up to drive away the enemies; it is the helping hand which he stretches out to save the corrupted; it is the power, the victorious war with which God comes upon the palace of the "strong man," the prince of this world, to wrest from him his spoils (Luke 11. 19). The kingdom of God is the redemption which bids every one to whom it comes to gladly lift up his head (Luke 21. 28); it is the banquet which God prepared long ago and now gives, to gather the hungry and wretched that they may enjoy it (Matt. 22. 2). Jesus passes through the country and wherever he is, help and salvation spring under his hands; but whatever he does, it is only as it were in illustration of his message of the kingdom of God; a few fragments from the totality of a comprehensive divine deed of salvation. Of what kind it is can be more clearly defined. In the beginning of his ministry, according to John 3, Jesus had that nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus. There the question was likewise of the kingdom of God. But God manifests not his highest energies in

outward life but in this—that he grants the spirit of regeneration. With this thought a new series of pictures and revelations opens. The kingdom of God is the water of life which God now suffers to bubble, to quench the thirst forever; it is the bread of life from heaven to keep off death (John 6. 32 seq.); a good fruitful seed which God scatters over the field of the world (Matt. 13. 24 seq.); the leaven which is mixed into the meal of the human race (Matt. 13. 33). And, if one wishes to include the whole in a narrower compass, let him say: the new, which God does sow in order to realize that approach of himself and of his kingdom, is this—that he gets ready to bring about the precious sum of promises which Jesus promised in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5. 3-12). The highest treasures of his life and his love God has kept under lock and key till then; now he opens them up and a fullness of help, consolation and blessing runs through the poor world to redeem it—this is the meaning of the new message which Jesus brings.

There may be a view of God and the world to which such a thought may be unin-

telligible. That God moves from a 'not yet!' to a 'now!'; that he himself passes through the difference of darkness and manifestation, of silence and speech, of design and deed, of quiet looking on and energetic grasping, is very inconceivable. It knows indeed a progress, but this belongs entirely to humanity; its ability to embrace God in himself increases, not however the desire of God to come out of himself. And, even if this were so, it is still no new relation which he gives to the world, but even the one, original and unchangeable, that of being the mental life-foundation of the world. But though the view opposed to this may comprise ever so many difficulties—this changes nothing of the fact, that Jesus expressly uttered it, yea, that he inseparably connected it with the new message which he brought.

But, may this message really be considered as new and as peculiar to Jesus? Thus we must ask once again. For according to the record of Matthew, John the Baptist already preached before Jesus: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3. 2). With this we stand indeed on firm, historical ground; for according to Jesus's own word,

the special greatness of the Baptist consisted in this, that he was allowed to proclaim that message immediately before himself (Matt. 11. 11, 14). But when John declared that after him a mightier one shall come, he may well have had the feeling, that in his mouth that message will have an entirely different meaning than in his own. And when Jesus commenced his ministry, John felt such a great distance between his own thoughts and the work of Jesus, that he asked: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Despite these facts, it cannot be doubted that an inner harmony exists between the main thought of the message of John and that of the message of Jesus. The Baptist too had to proclaim it as a something new that God had entered upon a decisive forward-movement. But two causes prevent us from regarding the message of Jesus as a mere imitation of the Johannean. The Baptist proclaims the nearness of the kingdom of heaven, because he knows that "mightier" is on the way; Jesus, however, because he is himself this "mightier"; that means, the Baptist proclaims it as one to be expected very shortly, Jesus as a work

of God now becoming realized. The message of the former establishes the final close of prophecy; that of the other the beginning of its fulfillment. This is the one difference. And the other: the Baptist and Jesus, both proclaim a double content of the divine forward-movement, judgment and grace. But the Baptist emphasized judgment, Jesus emphasized grace. Thus the message of Jesus remains new and independent even in the face of that of his most immediate predecessor; in this direction it comes also not from man, but from God.

Yes, from God! That God has arisen to permeate the world with the powers of his salvation and to save it, can only enter into the mind of a man to whom God had revealed it. Teachings concerning God can be invented by man; messages of new intentions and acts of God, should they not be fraudulent, must come from God himself; and these considerations lead us to make plain also that last, thus far not yet explained subject, the question as to the personal dignity which Jesus claims. Whoever is trusted by God with a new message to the world, is a prophet. If Jesus's message was the

highest of all, he is also the highest among the prophets. But he claimed to be more (Matt. 16. 15 seq.). He called himself the Messiah; he ascribed to himself the power to have authority over the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16. 19), and spoke of his future divine glory including the judgment. Before we were in inner distress over against this fact; can we now understand it better? This was the message which Jesus had to bring, that God sends new powers of healing into the diseased world, and that on this account the kingdom of heaven now begins on earth, of which the world till then had nothing but longing and in the most favorable case among the Jews only hope.

And what are these powers of love? They flutter not in secret spell through the air, but are comprised in him who could call himself the physician, who healed the sick. With a glance at the coming son of Mary, whom his own child, born unto him in his old age, is to serve as herald, Zacharias rejoices: "God hath visited and redeemed his people" (Luke I. 68). This son of Mary goes through Israel and a gracious message comes from his mouth. But from his hands and even

from his garment (Matt. 9. 21) flows the power of healing; from his depths arises the spring of new life; in his blood is dissolved the great debt of humanity. Thus he was the highest among all messengers of God and yet, at the same time, more than a mere messenger; for that divine message requires not only a mouth which proclaims it, but also a hand which executes it; and this uplifted finger of God, the stretched-out hand against the stronger, the bread of life and light of life, is he, he himself, his own messenger, the Messiah and Saviour. But, if he was this, he could also demand with all energy to be considered as more than a prophet. The setting and space of a mere humanly earthly life is too narrow for the mediation of a fundamental, continual, divine help; it expands with inner necessity to heavenly power and eternal divine power; and we understand that he, who dies on the cross, is sure of ascending to the right hand of God. But in that case the Messianic testimony of Jesus is understood, not as an unnecessary form, but as a revelation of the innermost secret of the message of God which he gave us.

We endeavored to define the new in the teaching of Jesus. The way which we first took led us past the goal; the newness of Jesus, compared with scribism and the prophets disappeared under our hands; and not only the newness of his teaching but the purity of his personal life was endangered. We then saw that we could not confine the new teaching of Jesus to this and not especially seek in this, that he revealed unto us a new ideal of the fear of God; consequently, we returned again to the beginning and conceived it more deeply, and, behold, everything became more definite and regular, when we perceived that the new teaching of Jesus lies in the message which he brings, that God arose to transform the world to a kingdom of heaven through Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, the relation of Jesus to the scribes around him, to the prophets before him, to the message of God beside him, yea, his relation to himself, is clear and true, because the new of his teaching is comprised in the simple news: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

