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PAUL'S IDEA OF DELIVERANCE¹

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THE Christian career of the Apostle Paul covers a period of about thirty years, but it is not until he had behind him almost a score of years of Christian activity and reflection that his extant letters begin to appear. They are not essays intended for publication but pastoral writings designed to meet the specific need of the believers addressed. Definite convictions are always present, but they are intimated rather than systematically expressed; they are seen not in repose but in action; and they often appear as flashes of insight of far-reaching significance. In writings of this character, we can not expect to find a carefully balanced arrangement of religious thought; but we may hope to discover the leading ideas, even if we cannot present them in the proper perspective. To one of these religious ideas, perhaps the ruling one, it is my purpose to address myself briefly—the idea of deliverance.²

¹ Presidential Address delivered before the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis at a meeting held in Union Theological Seminary, New York City, December 30, 1929.

² To the following investigations my obvious indebtedness should be acknowledged: A. C. McGiffert, *Apostolic Age*, p. 113ff.; G. F. Moore, *Sacrifice* (in *Ency. Bib.*), *History of Religions*, II, p. 123ff., and *Judaism*; J. H. Ropes, *Righteousness and the Righteousness of God in the Old Testament and in St. Paul*, in *J. B. L.*, XXII, p. 211ff.; W. H. P. Hatch, *The Pauline Idea of Faith*; F. C. Porter, *Place of Apocalyptic Conceptions in the Thought of Paul*, in *J. B. L.*, XLI, p. 183ff.; E. F. Scott, *The Gospel and its Tributaries*; and James Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament*.

The starting point of Paul's religious thought is the conviction that he has been delivered from the bondage of sinful flesh and is under the permanent control of the Spirit of Christ. His personal religious life, to put it tersely in a triad of his own mintage, is a life of faith, hope and love. By faith, he lives in fellowship with and under the leading of a "spiritual," that is, divine Lord who is conceived not only as seated at the right hand of God or as the *praesens numen* in a company of worshipers, but also, and characteristically, as dwelling in the heart of the believer. In this intimate attachment to the immanent divine Power, designated interchangeably Christ, Lord or The Spirit, everything seems new to Paul. He is no longer at odds with God, but at peace with him. Delivered from the thralldom of human nature within and demonic and astral forces without, he is free to do what he wills, or, in other words, to do what the Divine constrains him to do. By faith, peace with God is attained at once; and in faith, love arises, for the Christ within is the embodiment of love, and Christ's love, which is God's love, creates and fosters in the believer a like love for the neighbor. And from the love that comes from faith, hope is inspired, the assured hope of complete deliverance at the Advent, when believers, conformed outwardly as well as inwardly to Christ, will be with the Lord forever.

This sense of peace and freedom, of love and hope which the Apostle enjoys is due solely to his cleaving by faith to a person, a person who had lived in the flesh, had died on a cross, but had been raised from the dead and lives by the power of God. On this, that God raised Jesus from the dead, everything else depends. It is the conviction that Jesus lives which accounts for Paul's break with the past and starts the experience and reflection which resulted in his idea of deliverance. Unfortunately, there are no letters of Paul from the earlier and major part of his Christian life. And again unfortunately, the extant letters do not disclose unambiguously his pre-Christian attitude; they do not explain that revelation or vision which convinced him that Jesus lives; nor do they permit us to trace the steps taken after the revelation by which he arrived at the mature outlook that the surviving letters substantially presuppose.

We learn that "as touching the righteousness which is in the law" he, a Pharisee, was "found blameless;" that his attachment to Christ came at a time when he was persecuting believers; that he had a vision or revelation of "Christ," "our Lord," or "His Son;" and that, in consequence thereof, he began at once, without consulting others, to preach among the Gentiles. But what "vision" or "revelation" means to him; what connotation he gave to the words "Christ," "Lord," or "Son" at the time, if he used them; and what his "gospel" that is, his interpretation of the significance of the living Jesus, actually was at the time of his initial experience, we do not know. All that we are sure of is that Paul was convinced that Jesus lives and that he preached him forthwith among the Gentiles.

After some three years of preaching and reflection, Paul went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter, one of the three intimates of Jesus and the first to be convinced that he was raised from the dead. So far as we know, Paul had never met Jesus of Nazareth. What information he had of him prior to the revelation must, we should suppose, have been gained from his fellow-Pharisees and from the believers whom he persecuted, information sufficient to lead him to approve the crucifixion and to induce him to eliminate those who were asserting that Jesus was "the Anointed" and was living, active and the only hope for Israel. What Peter and Paul talked about during this visit of a fortnight is not recorded. Paul could have learned the substance of what Jesus had done and said in his brief career from baptism to death and might have discerned, even more clearly than Peter himself, the import of the character and mission of Jesus.

Subsequent to the visit to Peter, there is an interval of about sixteen years before the first extant letter was written. During this long period, we know that Paul was preaching among the Gentiles but do not know the exact form which his gospel took. With some plausibility, we may infer from the letters that he was reflecting on the significance of his personal experience of deliverance by faith in the living Christ; that he was interpreting this experience in universal terms and connecting it with the purpose of God; that he was seeking an explanation, in the light of the divine plan, for the

fact which was a difficulty not only to Jews and Greeks but also to himself, the crucifixion; that he was sensitive to the ideas which Gentile converts brought into the ecclesia along with their faith; that he had come to believe that the need of the world was a monotheism freed from all suspicion of exclusiveness, a church of God in which all are one irrespective of race, sex, or social condition, a unity of the Spirit in which both individual and collective aspirations after God are satisfied; that this need of the world could be met through the help of a divine personal agent, the Lord Jesus; that in closely associating the "one God, the Father" with the "one Lord, Jesus Christ," he was intending not to suggest a break from his ancestral religion but to indicate the way in which that religion could become universal; and that sinfulness, the obstacle to this redeemed and united humanity, could be ended by faith in that Christ whom God, in keeping with his original purpose of mercy, had sent to assume sinful flesh with a view to its riddance.

II

Paul's theory of deliverance may well have been reached before the date of the first extant epistle, but it is developed and clarified in the effort to meet the difficulties, felt by his converts, about the Law and the place and source of moral excellence. The theory, as intimated in the epistles, is in the main clear, though it is not very likely that all its component elements can be polarized. In attempting a sketch of it my direct concern is not with the provenance of the materials at his disposal but with the use he made of them.

Flesh, to Paul, is not frail humanity in contrast with God, but sinful, morally helpless, human nature in opposition to the divine Spirit. Those who are "in the flesh" (and all who are not "in the Spirit" are "in the flesh") are at enmity with God, unable to please him, and doomed to death, "death" meaning regularly not cessation of earthly existence but separation from God. Sin and flesh are interchangeable, if not quite identical terms, for the same results are ascribed to each. How this "flesh of sin," "body of sin" or "body of flesh" came to be sinful, Paul does not say. He believes in the existence of hostile, supernatural powers and is assured that Christ

at his advent will make an end of them; but he does not regard sin as a demon nor does he indicate anywhere that flesh became sinful through the infection of Satan. He accepts, without explanation, the view that, with the trespass of Adam, sin came into the world, but he does not say, as we expect him to say, that Adam transgressed the command of God because of his sinful flesh. Whatever Paul's view of its origin may have been, sinfulness exists in all the descendants of Adam. Each individual is composed of what is called an Outer Man, that is, the body, flesh or members, and an Inner Man, that is, the heart, soul, mind, self, or (in the case of the believers only, and that too, rarely) spirit. In the seventh chapter of Romans it is emphasized that Sin dwells not in the Inner Man of the unbeliever but in the Outer Man, an emphasis which suggests that this dualism is not purely ethical. The sinful Outer Man makes havoc of the Inner Man, driving him to transgress the will of God and so exposing him to the consequence of sinfulness, namely death, that is, separation from God. The seat of the trouble is accordingly sinful flesh; and salvation which can come only from God through the Lord, Jesus Christ, is deliverance from "the body of this death," in short, the riddance of sinful flesh.

As regards the body, this riddance is at first potential and then at the advent actual, for at that time the believer is to have a body freed from the vestiges of sinful flesh, a body of glory conformed to that of Christ. Paul does not look forward to the immortality of the soul apart from the body, nor does he think that the present body is to survive. He does his best to forge some link between the body as at present constituted and the future "pneumatic" body, but does not succeed in making it clear whether this future body is something entirely new or whether it is the result of the continuous operation of the Spirit, a process of "pneumatization," if the word is permissible. With this redemption of the body, however conceived, the hoped-for completed deliverance is realized.

As regards the soul, it is tempting to assume, on the analogy of what happens to the body, that the renewal of the "inner man" or *nous* is thought of as a transformation from "sarkic" to "pneu-

matic" substance. On the other hand, this renewal may be regarded not as a quasi-physical penetration of the self by the divine Spirit, as if deification were intended, but as moral renewal prompted and fostered by that indwelling Spirit. In any case, however realistically the relation of the believer to his Lord is conceived, the human is not absorbed in the Divine; and the new life into which the man of faith enters is a life of inward fellowship in which the human is led and controlled by the Divine.

To be qualified as the deliverer, Christ assumed sinful flesh with a view to ending it; he was raised from the dead that believers, by fellowship with him, might, like him, be freed from the bondage of that flesh and, like him, live to God in a newness of life that carries with it right relations not only to God but also to men; and he is to come shortly to make the potential deliverance actual, the possession of the body of glory being the culmination of the hoped-for redemption. The death of Christ is not simply the transition to the state of exaltation or glorification. It accomplished something which is independent of man's appropriation of its benefits. By it, to use the Apostle's dramatic language, the flesh was condemned, put off, abolished or slain. How the result was achieved is less obvious than the conviction that it was achieved. It may be that Paul imagines that Christ took upon himself vicariously the flesh of Adamic posterity and ended it by his death; certain only is his assurance that the grip of flesh is broken once for all when Christ died to it; that the believer dies with Christ to sinfulness and is raised with him to a state of right relations to God that obligates and secures right relations to men; and that behind this redemption is the love of God who sent his son to assume sinful flesh that it might be ended and that believers might "become the righteousness of God in him."

God then is the sole author of this salvation. Had he not intervened, the outlook for sinners and enemies would have been hopeless. But God is not only severe but kind; not only Judge but the originator of salvation; and he exercises not only his wrath or condemnation but also his righteousness or salvation. And Paul, in the spirit of Isaiah and the Psalms, lays the stress on this right-

eousness of God, meaning by it both the outgoing of his salvation to believers and the status of salvation to which all men of faith have access. The positive aspect of deliverance is peace with God or right relations to him; but this condition of reconciliation or righteousness of God in Christ depends upon the riddance of sinful flesh, the negative aspect of deliverance.

Since deliverance, in its negative aspect, is the riddance of sinful flesh, the law is excluded as the instrument of salvation. God is indeed righteous and demands that men must be in the right of it religiously with him; but acceptance with him on the basis of obedience to the law is out of the question, for the law is impotent in the face of sinful flesh. It had its historical part to play in the divine plan of salvation, but its office was not to check transgressions but to increase them, bringing to consciousness man's sinfulness and his inability to keep the law, even if he would. Paul's attitude to the law as a way of salvation is apparently not the logical opposite of his distinctive conception of faith, but arises from a personal conviction that the law is of no avail for the kind of salvation that humanity needed.

Repentance is not in the power of the man in the flesh. The word accordingly is of rare occurrence in Paul's letters; and the idea seems to have no footing in his conception of deliverance. The expected correlate, forgiveness, though retained, is not adjusted deftly to the thought of salvation as deliverance. References to divine forgiveness are infrequent. The idea when expressed (—it does not appear on the surface of 1, 2 Thess., Gal., I Cor., Phil. or Phm.) is conveyed by the verbs "forgive" and "take away" (in citations, Rom. 4 7, 11 27), "not reckon" (2 Cor. 5 19), and "show favor to" (Col. 2 13; 3 13 = Eph. 4 32); and by the substantives *paresis* (Rom. 3 25) and *aphesis* (Col. 1 14 = Eph. 1 7). The notable infrequency of these direct references suggests that Paul's chief concern is not forgiveness and not relief from the feeling of moral culpability, but rather deliverance from that sinful flesh which makes inevitable repeated deflection from the will of God. A divine forgiveness of past transgressions which did not presuppose or include the abolishment of the cause of transgression would not solve the

difficulty which Paul confronted. At all events, when Paul handles, in the seventh chapter of Romans, the interrelation of law, sin and flesh, he puts himself imaginatively in the plight of the typical man in the flesh which his theory requires; depicts in highly dramatic language the conflict between the Outer and Inner Man of the unbeliever; insists that the Outer Man makes the Inner Man *sarkinos* and forces him even against his will to transgress, and suggests that the responsible factor in transgressions is neither the law nor the self, but the sinful law that exists in the members; and, at the climax, lets the wretched man cry out significantly not for release from the sense of guilt, not for divine forgiveness, but for deliverance from the body of this death.

But although the Inner Man of the unbeliever is here regarded as not responsible for transgressions, and although in the sequel divine condemnation falls not on him but on sin in the flesh, nevertheless it is true that the Inner Man has transgressed the revealed will of God. These past transgressions, trespasses or sins must be forgiven; and forgiveness, so Paul is held to believe, can be granted only on the ground of the expiatory death of Christ. Since expiation is the purpose of sacrifices, and since, in a sense, the sacrificial cultus, as a whole, could be considered expiatory, it would be natural for Paul, a Jew, to interpret the death of Christ as a sacrifice to expiate sins. But sacrificial language is as infrequent in the letters of Paul as it is common in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Moreover it is applied to men as well as to Christ. Hence the sacrificial terms are used metaphorically. To explain the metaphor, attention is drawn to the theory, based on an interpretation of Isaiah 53, to the effect that the sufferings and especially the death of the righteous for the unrighteous avail to expiate transgressions. The penalty of transgression is visited upon the righteous and the sinner is cleared. Vicarious death is not a sacrifice, but it, like sacrifice, is expiatory. Hence a metaphor drawn from the cultus is apt.

This interpretation of Paul's conception of the death of Christ may be valid. The Apostle may have fused the idea of deliverance from sinful flesh, his primary concern, with the idea of forgiveness, and connected both with the death of Christ. Nevertheless, the

hypothesis of vicarious expiation is not without difficulties. For example, it is striking that Paul, whose favorite author, along with the Psalmist, is Isaiah, never designates Christ as the *pais* or *doulos* of God and but once, if it is an instance, alludes to Isaiah 53 in connection with the death of Christ (Rom. 4 25). Moreover, in referring to the death of Christ, he rarely says distinctly that it is "for our sins" (Gal. 1 4, 1 Cor. 15 3, Rom. 4 25) but is content to say that Christ died or gave himself "for us." This death "for us" may be the exact equivalent of the death "for our sins" and indicate the notion of vicarious expiation. Or else this death "for us" may refer to the death which, in delivering us from sinful flesh, delivers us also from sinning; in which case it is likewise the death "for our sins." And again, it is worth noting that while forgiveness is attached to reconciliation (2 Cor. 5 19) and deliverance (Col. 1 14 = Eph. 1 7), it is not directly connected with the death of Christ.

These difficulties might be overcome, if we could decipher the meaning of the puzzling verses in the third chapter of Romans in which Paul inserts between an implied protasis ("since we are saved (justified) freely by his grace through the deliverance which is in Christ Jesus") and an apodosis ("where then is the boasting?") a relative clause, made up of eight prepositional phrases, which tells of God's setting forth Christ as a *hilasterion*, that is, an expiation (4 Macc. 17 22) or means of forgiveness (cf. Psalm 129 LXX and Sirach 32 (35) 5) — the only instance of this word or its cognates in Paul. The meaning of the passage is admittedly obscure and the time at my disposal precludes exegesis. Suffice it to observe that the death of Christ is associated directly not with the forgiveness of past acts of sin but with the righteousness of God and deliverance; that this salvation of God, operating by deliverance, is conditioned upon the death of Christ; and that the expiation or means of forgiveness is provided not by man but by God.

In short it is clear that Paul reserves a place for divine forgiveness in his idea of deliverance; it is clear that the death of Christ is linked directly with the riddance of sinful flesh and indirectly with forgiveness; but it is not clear how the idea of salvation as deliverance or redemption is related to the idea of salvation as divine forgiveness.

III

While God has done all through Christ, and boasting on man's part is excluded, there is something that man must do, if "do" is the proper verb, in order to appropriate the benefits of Christ's work of deliverance. In contemporary Judaism, repentance is the condition of divine forgiveness; in Paul faith and faith only is the human condition of the divine deliverance. This faith is difficult to describe. Its object is almost always personal, rarely God, never the Spirit, regularly Christ. Very rarely faith is a charisma, which some possess, or the quality of faithfulness; quite often it is an inward conviction, especially the belief that Jesus is Lord, that is, that God raised him from the dead; but faith in Christ, in Paul's distinctive usage, stands as the name for that intimacy with Christ which is closely akin to being in him. It is something from, through, on, or by which (but never on account of which) men are brought into fellowship with Christ and under his dominion with the result of being in the state of rightness and peace with God. Faith is a condition but not a cause. It is not something one does. It is rather an attitude or disposition of the heart or self to Christ, a receptive, if not a purely passive attitude. Doubtless, trust and confidence are involved; but the stress is laid on the quality of reliance, faithfulness, or fidelity. The life of faith is virtually the life in Christ. Once begun, it never ends, for even in the beyond it abides. By faith, the Inner Man is saved at once; and provided faith is strong, there should be no deflections from the will of the indwelling Christ.

The primary need of man, according to Paul, is religion. But religion, as his Jewish converts knew and as some of his Gentile converts had to learn, must express itself in right conduct. In Paul's vocabulary, faith is the religious, and love, almost without exception, the ethical term. The two are vitally connected, for the object of faith and the inspirer of love is Christ. Faith itself may be more passive than active, but it puts the believer in touch with a divine energy that constrains him to active love. This energy is the indwelling Christ whose character, like that of God himself, is love. It was for his obedient love, in the days on earth, that God

highly exalted him and named him Kyrios. Hence contact with him in the life of faith generates love in the believer. This love is a love as Christ loves, "the law of Christ" — to use Paul's phrase. One might suppose that that man in the flesh who consented to the goodness of the law but could not keep it, when once by faith he had come under the sway of a lord superior to sin in the flesh, would henceforth keep the law, being now able to do so. But Paul is convinced that the ancestral code is established in the single word, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" and he seems to believe that the Christ within will cause this love to work in all discernment. This love never fails. Speaking with tongues, prophecy, and charismatic faith and gnosis will cease; but love, like faith and hope, abides in the beyond. And the greatest of these is love, for this love is of the essence of the Divine.

By faith in Christ, the believer is at peace with God and constrained to love. So far as the Inner Man is concerned, deliverance is virtually a present possession. The Outer Man however must wait in patience until the advent for the hoped-for redemption of the body. The future does not so much change as perfect the Inner Man; but it changes the Outer Man, for the potential destruction of sinful flesh is made actual and the body is transformed. Existence in the beyond is assumed for both unbelievers and believers. In some unexplained way both alike are to come before the seat of judgment; but the decision of the judge simply confirms what already is. Unbelievers continue their existence in separation from God. Believers maintain their eternal life, the life to God in Christ, with the added boon of a glorified body. The hope is neither resurrection to earth nor immortality of the soul but eternal fellowship with Christ. Hence like him, the believer must have a body not of flesh, but, to use the undefined expression, of spirit or glory. The eschatology of Paul is redemptive. It is essential to the completion of deliverance.

IV

One closing observation. The gospel, to Paul, is the power of God unto salvation, for the righteousness of God is revealed in it.

God is sovereign. Unfaith should be impossible. But the fact is that there are relatively few converts from Hellenism and fewer still from Judaism. Why, with a powerful and divine gospel, is there unfaith at all? Paul finds but one answer: whatever is in result must also have been the original purpose of the Almighty. And into the plan of God he puts believers and unbelievers, "the saved" and "the destroyed," as he calls them. On the one hand, there is faith; the believers then need not be anxious for the outcome, for "God appointed them not unto wrath but unto the obtaining of salvation." On the other hand, there is unfaith; but this result must likewise have been the divine intent. To put it sharply: "God has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens." But Paul's idea of predestination, as Professor George F. Moore (*History of Religions II*, 134) remarks, "is not the determinist corollary of an idea of God which asserts for him a causality so absolute as to leave no place for finite free will; it is his solution of the problem. Why, when the gospel is so convincing, do not all men believe?" Indeed, this very Paul, who views the world in the shortened perspective of an imminent advent, and believes that "God hath shut up all unto disobedience that he might have mercy on all," cannot but feel that somehow ultimate unfaith is impossible. He hints at the mysterious outcome but does not explain it. The Gentiles will have faith; their faith will provoke his kinsmen to faith; and so all Israel, provoked by jealousy to faith, will be saved. His words are: "I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved." Paul ends, as he begins, with the Sovereign God whose nature is love and whose purpose is deliverance.