

## The Origin of Paul's Religion

### The Jewish Environment (Part 6)

By John Gresham Machen

How did the death of Jesus ever come to be interpreted by Paul as a vicarious death of the Messiah? The natural answer would be that it was because of something that Jesus had said or because of an impression derived from His character. That answer is excluded by Wrede's hypothesis. How then did Paul come to regard the death of Jesus as a vicarious death of the Messiah? It could only have been because Paul already had a doctrine of the vicarious death of the Messiah before his conversion. But nothing is more unlikely. There is in late pre-Christian Jewish literature not a trace of such a doctrine.<sup>1</sup> The Messiah in 4 Ezra is represented, indeed, as dying, but His death is of benefit to no one. He dies, along with all the inhabitants of earth, simply in order to make way for the new world.<sup>2</sup> In Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew Trypho is represented as admitting that the Messiah was to suffer. But the suffering is not represented as vicarious.

And since the Dialogue was written in the middle of the second century after Christ, the isolated testimony of Trypho cannot be used as a witness to first-century conditions. It is perfectly possible, as Schürer suggested, that certain Jews of the second century were only led to concede the suffering of the Messiah in the light of the Scriptural arguments advanced by the Christians. The rabbinical evidence as to sufferings of the Messiah is also too late to be used in reconstructing the pre-Christian environment of Paul. And of real evidence from the period just before Paul's day there is none. In 4 Maccabees vi. 28, 29, indeed (less clearly in xvii. 21, 22), the blood of the righteous is represented as bringing purification for the people. The dying martyr Eleazar is represented as praying:<sup>3</sup> "Be merciful unto thy people, and let our punishment be a satisfaction in their behalf. Make my blood their purification, and take my soul to ransom their souls." This passage, however, is entirely isolated. There is no evidence whatever that the vicarious suffering of the righteous was anything like an established doctrine in the Judaism of Paul's day, and in particular there is no evidence that in pre-Christian Judaism the idea of vicarious suffering was applied to the Messiah. Undoubtedly Isaiah li might have formed a basis for such an application; it may even seem surprising that that glorious passage was not more influential. But as

<sup>1</sup> See Schürer, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 648-651 (English Translation, Division II, vol. ii, pp. 184-187).

<sup>2</sup> It will be remembered, moreover, that 4 Ezra, at least in its completed form, dates from long after the time of Paul.

<sup>3</sup> Townshend, in Charles, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 674

a matter of fact, Judaism was moving in a very different direction; the later doctrine of the Messiah had absolutely no place for a vicarious death or for vicarious suffering. All the sources are here in agreement. Neither in the apocalypses nor in what is pre-supposed in the New Testament about Jewish belief is there any trace of a vicarious death of the Messiah. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that such an idea was extremely repulsive to the Jewish mind. The Cross was unto the Jews a stumbling-block.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the warm, personal relation of love and gratitude which Paul sustains to the risen Christ is entirely unexplained by anything in his Jewish environment. It is not explained by the Jewish doctrine of the Messiah; it is not explained by reflection upon the vicarious death of the Messiah. For the Messiah in Jewish expectation was not to suffer a vicarious death. Such a relation of love and gratitude could be sustained only toward a living person

It could be sustained toward Jesus of Nazareth, if Jesus continued to live in glory, but it could not be sustained toward the Messiah of the apocalypses.

The third difference between the Pauline Christ and the Messiah of the apocalypses concerns the very center of the Pauline conception—there is in the apocalypses no doctrine of the divinity of the Messiah. In Paul, the divinity of Christ is presupposed on every page. The word "divinity" is indeed often being abused; in modern pantheizing liberalism, it means absolutely nothing. But the divinity of Christ in the Pauline Epistles is to be understood in the highest possible sense. The Pauline doctrine of the divinity of Christ is not dependent upon individual passages; it does not depend upon the question whether in Rom. ix. 5 Paul applies the term "God" to Christ. Certainly he does so by any natural interpretation of his words. But what is far more important is that the term "Lord" in the Pauline Epistles, the characteristic Pauline name of Christ, is every whit as much a designation of deity as is the term "God."<sup>5</sup> Everywhere in the Epistles, moreover, the attitude of Paul toward Christ is not merely the attitude of man to man, or scholar to master; it is the attitude of man toward God.

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<sup>4</sup> B. W. Bacon (*Jesus and Paul*, 1921, pp. 45-49) seeks to bridge the gulf between Jesus and Paul by supposing that Jesus himself, somewhat like the Maccabean hero, finally attained, after the failure of His original program and at the very close of His life, the conception that His approaching death was to be in some sort an expiation for His people. But the idea of expiation which Bacon attributes to Jesus is no doubt very different from the Pauline doctrine of the Cross of Christ. The gulf between Jesus and Paul is therefore not really bridged. Moreover, it cannot be said that Bacon's hypothesis of successive stages in the experience of Jesus, culminating in the idea of expiation attained at the last supper, has really helped at all to solve the problem presented to every historian who proceeds upon naturalistic presuppositions by Jesus' lofty claims. At least however, this investigator of the problem of "Jesus and Paul" has betrayed a salutary consciousness of the fact that the Pauline conception of Jesus' redemptive work is inexplicable unless it finds some justification in the mind of Jesus Himself. Only, the justification which Bacon himself has found particularly his account of the way in which the idea of expiation is supposed to have arisen in Jesus' mind—is entirely inadequate.

<sup>5</sup> See Warfield, "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," in *Princeton Theological Review*, xv, 1917, pp. 1-20.

Such an attitude is absent from the apocalyptic representation of the Messiah. For example, the way in which God and Christ are linked together regularly at the beginnings of the Pauline Epistles—God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup>—this can find no real parallel in 1 Enoch. The isolated passages (1 Enoch xlix. 10; lxx. 1) where in 1 Enoch the Lord of Spirits and the Son of Man or the Elect One are linked together by the word "and," do not begin to approach the height of the Pauline conception. It is not surprising and not particularly significant that the wicked are designated in one passage as those who have "denied the Lord of Spirits and His anointed" (1 Enoch xix. 10). Such an expression would be natural even if the Anointed One were, for example, merely an earthly king of David's line. What is characteristic of Paul, on the other hand, is that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are not merely united by the conjunction "and" in isolated passages—that might happen even if they belonged to different spheres of being—but are united regularly and as a matter of course, and are just as regularly separated from all other beings except the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, God and Christ, in Paul, have attributed to them the same functions. Grace and peace, for example, come equally from both. Such a representation would be quite incongruous in 1 Enoch. Equally incongruous in 1 Enoch would be the Pauline separation of the Christ from ordinary humanity and from angels. The author of 1 Enoch could hardly have said, "Not from men nor through a man but through the Elect One and the Lord of Spirits," as Paul says, "Not from men nor through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal. i. 1). On the other hand, the way in which 1 Enoch includes the Elect One in the middle of a long list of beings who praise the Lord of Spirits (1 Enoch lxi. 10, 11) would be absolutely inconceivable in Paul.

This stupendous difference is established not by isolated passages, but by every page of the Pauline Epistles. The Pauline Christ is exalted to an infinite height above the Messiah of the apocalypses. How did He reach this height? Was it because He was identified with Jesus of Nazareth? But that identification, if Jesus of Nazareth were a mere man, would have dragged Him down rather than lifted Him up. There lies the unsolved problem. Even if Paul before his conversion believed in the heavenly Messiah of the apocalypses, he had to exalt that Messiah far beyond all that had ever been attributed to Him in the boldest visions of the Jewish seers, before he could produce the Christ of the Epistles. Yet the only new thing that had entered Paul's life was identification of the Messiah with Jesus. Why did that identification lift the Messiah to the throne of God? Who was this Jesus, who by His identification with the Messiah, lifted the Messiah even far above men's wildest dreams?

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<sup>6</sup> Warfield, *loc. cit.*

Thus the Messianic doctrine of the apocalypses is an insufficient basis for the Pauline Christology. Its insufficiency is admitted by Hans Windisch.<sup>7</sup> But Windisch seeks to supply what is lacking in the apocalyptic Messiah by appealing to the Jewish doctrine of "Wisdom." The apocalyptic doctrine of the Messiah, Windisch admits, will not explain the origin of the Pauline Christology; for example, it will not explain Paul's doctrine of the activity of Christ in creation. But "Wisdom" is thought to supply the lack.

In Prov. viii, "wisdom" is celebrated in lofty terms, and is said to have existed before the creation of the world. "Wisdom" is here boldly personified in a poetic way. But she is not regarded as a real person separate from God. In later books, however, notably in the Alexandrian "Wisdom of Solomon," the personification is developed until it seems to involve actual personality. Wisdom seems to be regarded as an "hypostasis," a figure in some sort distinct from God. This hypostasis, Windisch believes, was identified by Paul with Christ, and the result was the Pauline Christology.

The figure of Wisdom, Windisch believes, will supply two elements in the Pauline Christ-religion which are lacking in the Messiah of the apocalypses. In the first place, it will account for the Pauline notion that Christ was active in creation, since Wisdom in Jewish belief is repeatedly represented as the assessor or even the instrument of the Creator. In the second place, it will account for the intimate relation between Paul and his Christ, since Wisdom is represented in the "Wisdom of Solomon" as entering into the wise man, and the wise man seems to be represented in Proverbs vii and in Ecclesiasticus as the mouthpiece of Wisdom.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Die göttliche Weisheit der Juden und die paulinische Christologie." in *Neutestamentliche Studien Georg Heinrici dargebracht*, 1914, pp. 220-234.

<sup>8</sup> Windisch, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

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