

*ST. PAUL AND THE CONCEPTION OF THE  
"HEAVENLY MAN."*

IN a review of Brückner's well-known book, *Die Entstehung der paulinischen Christologie*, Heitmüller remarks: "I cannot admit that the idea of the Heavenly Man plays so fundamental a part [in Paul's theology] as the writer assumes. Here, no doubt, I assail an opinion which has almost become a dogma." Since these words were written (*Theol. L.Z.*, sp. 353, 1905), the dogma in question has become even more firmly established. It has taken a prominent place in many discussions of early Christianity. But it is perhaps worth while to isolate it from the larger Christological investigations of which it has formed part, and to attempt to estimate it on its own account.

In any such endeavour, two questions must, as far as possible, be kept separate. We may ask: What place does the idea of the Heavenly Man occupy in Paul's religious thought, viewed generally? And we may also enquire: To what extent does it implicitly influence his conception of Christ? A good deal of confusion has, I think, surrounded each of these inquiries.

Let us begin with the more general question. It is no exaggeration to say that the ordinary intelligent reader of Paul's Epistles would scarcely conclude that the Apostle is accustomed to think of Jesus Christ as the Heavenly Man. He loves to speak of Him as the "Son of God" and the "Lord." He thinks of Him predominantly as the Crucified and the Risen. He constantly refers to Him as the Redeemer

of men, who in great lowliness stooped to save them, and he uses various phrases to express the idea. In several passages Christ is virtually identified with the Spirit. One has no hesitation in asserting that these conceptions embrace Paul's favourite representations of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom he has been compelled to acknowledge the Messiah of God.

In two passages, from differing standpoints, Paul draws a comparison, which is really a contrast, between Adam and Jesus. In the first of these, Romans v. 12-21, Adam, the parent of humanity, is viewed as the originator of human sinfulness, which has brought death upon the race. In the light of *vv.* 13, 14, it is plain that for the thought of the Apostle, Adam's transgression implicated all his descendants. It is not of moment for the present discussion to ask what this actually meant for Paul. It is enough to recognise that the human race is regarded as tainted by sin from its very beginning. Over against this baneful heritage, which goes back to Adam, the Apostle sets the gift of righteousness, which comes to humanity through the one Man, Jesus Christ. The entire significance of the comparison (or contrast) appears in verse 19: "As through the disobedience of the one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the one the many shall be constituted righteous." Plainly, the references in this passage of Romans to Jesus Christ as "the one man" have simply in view the fact that He lived a human life, whose culmination in the death of the Cross Paul regards as the special channel of blessing for men. The whole paragraph must be read in the light of that which precedes it, v. 1-11. There, special emphasis is laid upon Christ's death for the ungodly (*vv.* 6, 8, 10), and the issue is shown to be salvation for all who through that death have been brought into right relations with God. I cannot find that any important fact

of redemption is adduced by the comparison between Christ and Adam. I am unable to agree with those scholars who discover here a peculiar importance attached by Paul to a racial act of Christ. The description of those who benefit by what Christ has done is surely in no sense racial: "they who receive the abundance of the grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life." These are the same persons as those designated "justified" and "reconciled" in the earlier part of the chapter. And Paul makes it plain that justification and reconciliation belong solely to faith. Accordingly, there is nothing in this comparison to exercise any dominant influence on Paul's conception of the function of Jesus Christ. He does not here speak of Him as the Second Adam. No stress is laid upon the idea of the Founder of a new humanity. It is possible, of course, to deduce that notion from the Apostle's statements, but it does not seem to possess any special normative value for him.

The great discussion of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians xv. is the only other context in which a similar comparison is to be found. It is introduced, to begin with, in a very casual fashion, and immediately dropped. At this point it has no important bearing on the argument. Paul has just made this triumphant statement which sums up his previous reasoning: "But now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that have fallen asleep" (ver. 20). And then he is struck by the analogy: "For seeing that through man came death, through man also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." What "all" means in the second clause is made perfectly clear by the very next verse (23), where it is defined as "they that are Christ's at his coming." Here, again, there is no suggestion of any racial experience. This "being made alive" is the privilege of those who are united to Christ by faith.

The comparison is resumed when Paul discusses the nature of the resurrection-body. The culmination of the contrast between that which is buried and that which is raised is expressed in the words: "It is sown a natural body (*σῶμα ψυχικόν*), it is raised a spiritual body (*σῶμα πνευματικόν*).” The antithesis between the fleshly organism and that which is the vehicle of the perfected spirit prompts the Apostle to linger for a moment on the subject. Hence he continues: "If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual." As is his wont, he seeks confirmation for his position in the Old Testament: "So it is written, 'the' first 'man' Adam 'became a living soul (*ψυχὴν ζῶσαν*),' the last Adam became a life-giving spirit." This is the only instance of his use of the designation, "the last Adam." It is nothing short of absurd to assert, as some scholars do, that Paul meant his readers to infer that the statement about "the last Adam" formed part of his quotation from Scripture. The assertion is made to associate the Apostle's position with that of Philo. The latter, as is well known, builds a theory on the two references to the creation of man which occur in Genesis, namely, i. 26 and ii. 7. In his *Legg. Alleg.* I. § 31 (ed. Cohn and Wendland) he affirms: "There are two types of men, the one is heavenly, the other earthly. The heavenly, inasmuch as he has been made after the image of God (*κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ*, Gen. i. 26, LXX), has no part at all in corruptible and earthly essence, but the earthly was formed out of scattered material, which Scripture calls dust" (*χοῦν*, Gen. ii. 7, LXX). Now Philo distinctly declares that the heavenly or ideal man was created first, and afterwards the earthly (*De Opif. Mundi*, § 134). We are at once struck by the contrast between this idea and that expressed by Paul, who sets the "last Adam" over against the "first." But, to show what is the particular feature which he wishes to emphasise, he adds: "Not first

came the spiritual [body] but the natural, thereafter the spiritual." The statement reveals his purpose in introducing the comparison at all. It is not the *general* contrast between the first Adam and the last that interests him. It is that between the earthly organism of the progenitor of the race and the spiritual organism belonging to the glorified Man who has become "life-giving spirit." Only a distortion of the facts can find in this description of Christ a reference to His pre-incarnate existence. The passage is occupied exclusively with the nature of the resurrection-body. So when he proceeds: "The first man was from the earth, made of dust (*χοϊκός*), the second man is from heaven," he is not concerned with the general contrast between them but with the fact that Adam and Christ belong to two different spheres, a fact which has a direct bearing on the equipment of those descendants of Adam who have come into relation with Christ. His language is terse and compressed: "As is the earthly [man, *χοϊκός*], such also are the earthly [those who have entered upon no higher relationship], and as is the heavenly [man, *ἐπουράνιος*], such also are the heavenly [those united to Christ]." But his purpose is disclosed by the culminating section of the paragraph: "And just as we bore the image (*εἰκόνα*) of the earthly, we shall also bear [reading *φορέσομεν* instead of *φορέσωμεν*] the image of the heavenly." It is the new mode of being which engrosses his attention. And the remainder of the discussion (*vv.* 50-54) expresses in triumphant language his conviction that "this mortal must put on immortality."

Even a brief examination of the two crucial passages seems to show that the comparison (or contrast) between Adam and Christ is not a question of any theological moment for St Paul, but rather an impressive illustration calculated to vivify for his readers truths so central for his religious thought as Christ's death for men and the nature of the

future glorified existence as pledged by the experience of the glorified Lord Himself. Hence, when he speaks of "the one man, Jesus Christ," in Romans v., or of "the last Adam" and the "second man" in 1 Corinthians xv., we are not at liberty to make any inferences as to his view of the pre-incarnate Son of God, in whom he believes. He has obviously before his mind the historical Jesus in His human history, that history which has been the scene of what, for the Apostle, are His supreme experiences as Redeemer, His death on the Cross, and His resurrection to a glorified life.

If may therefore be said without hesitation that the figure of the Heavenly Man, as a description of Jesus in His pre-incarnate condition, does not at least appear on the surface of Paul's religious thinking. The Apostle values Jesus' humanity for many reasons: chiefly, perhaps, as an evidence of His unfathomable love for sinful men. It supplies the real background for his thoughts concerning the exalted Lord who had taken hold of his life and transformed it. But he does not even approximate to the intensity of feeling with which the writer to the Hebrews emphasises the one-ness of Jesus as man with His brethren. He is far more concerned with the relation of believers to their exalted Lord, or with that of the Church, which is His body, to Christ, her glorified Head.

Accordingly, I cannot see much ground in the Pauline Epistles for making the conception of the Last Adam or the Heavenly Man the regulating factor in the Christology of the Apostle. It is possible, by ingenuity, to arrange his leading ideas under such a category, but there are many others which present themselves far more spontaneously, as springing directly out of the crucial experience of his conversion and the reflexion upon it which inevitably followed. Paul prefers to set forth Christ as the Son of God

who loved him and gave Himself for him, or as the exalted Lord, whose spirit as the spirit of sonship creates new life in the soul of the believer.

So much for the first question which was suggested at the beginning of this study. The second is of a more elusive character, and rests on a series of bolder hypotheses. We may begin by asking: "Is there any clear evidence in the Epistles that Paul regarded the *pre-existent* Christ as the 'Heavenly Man'?" The only passage which claims careful consideration is that which was last examined in its more general bearings. It has been shown that the statement, "the last Adam was made a life-giving spirit," cannot refer to the original condition of Christ, for the "life-giving" has in mind the assimilation of believers to the living Lord in His self-manifestation as energising Spirit. It is His new condition as Lord (*κύριος*), that which Paul describes in Romans i. 4 as "determined to be Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness as the result of resurrection from the dead," which is imaged before his mind. That condition he explicitly distinguishes from his conception of the pre-existent Christ in Philippians ii. 6-11. A new factor has entered into the situation, and that factor is the result of His human experience. "Wherefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9). As man, Jesus possessed a *σῶμα ψυχικόν*, a "natural" organism. As conqueror of death through the Divine power He is clothed with a *σῶμα πνευματικόν*, a "spiritual" organism. There is no suggestion as to possession of a *σῶμα* in His pre-existence.

At first sight the hypothesis may appear to have some foundation in 1 Corinthians xv. 47, which belongs to the context we have just discussed: "The first man is from the earth (*γῆς*), made of dust (*χοϊκός*), the second man is from heaven (*ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ*)." What does this

last clause precisely mean? It must be interpreted in the light of its setting, and that is Paul's endeavour to show that, in the case of believers the "natural" body, consisting of flesh and blood, and belonging to them as members of the race of Adam, who according to the Genesis-story was formed from the dust of the earth, will be exchanged for or transformed into a "spiritual" body, in virtue of their relation to the living Christ, who Himself is invested with a "spiritual" body. What the process means is explicitly described in Philippians iii. 20, 21: "Our commonwealth is in heaven, whence also we eagerly look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, who shall transform the body of our humiliation into the form of the body of his glory, according to that energy by which he is able even to subdue all things to himself." This spiritual condition is to come after the natural. As the father of the race, himself "made of dust" (*χοϊκός*), was responsible for our first type of *σῶμα*, the Lord and Giver of Life is responsible for the second. He is the *fons et origo* of the new creation (cf. 2 Cor. v. 17). As such, He is designated by Paul *ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος*. There is no reference here to His pre-existence. It is even questionable if the Apostle has His earthly experience at all in view. The whole emphasis is laid on the kind of nature which belongs to Him as the source and medium of life to believers. He is *ἐξ οὐρανοῦ*. That this is meant to describe the quality of His being is plain from the fact that in the very next sentence He is called *ὁ ἐπουράνιος*. Indeed, if it were legitimate to press the phrase *ἐξ οὐρανοῦ*, we should be compelled to interpret it in the light of such passages as Philippians iii. 20, quoted above. For the very function of Christ with which Paul is concerned in our passage is there directly connected with His coming *ἐξ οὐρανοῦ*. Hence it is impossible to base any conclusion as to Paul's conception of a "Heavenly Man" on 1 Corinthians xv. 47.



But another aspect of the discussion is associated with the very texture of Paul's conception of Christ. Most scholars have been accustomed to approach that conception by way of the Apostle's conversion-experience. It is, indeed, difficult to reconstruct the picture of supra-sensible realities by which he represented to himself the living Christ. The most concrete description he gives of the crisis is found in two passages in 1 Corinthians. In chapter ix. 1, when defending the independence of his apostleship, he exclaims: "Have not I seen (ἐώρακα) Jesus our Lord?" In chapter xv. 8, after recounting the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to various disciples and groups of disciples, he concludes: "last of all . . . he appeared (ἑφθην) also to me." These statements obviously imply an event which somehow impressed his sense-perceptions. In others, a different phase of the occurrence is emphasised. Thus, in Galatians i. 15, he says: "When it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me (ἐν ἐμοί)." Closely akin is 2 Corinthians iv. 6: "It is the God who said, Light shall shine out of darkness [Gen. i. 3], who shone in our hearts to illuminate us with the knowledge of the glory of God (τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ) in the face of Christ." And yet the term *δόξα* used here links the former passages to this. For it is probable that it usually connotes for Paul a manifestation of the being of God which has something of a sensible as well as a purely spiritual side. Now we have already seen that the risen Christ was for the Apostle pre-eminently *πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν*. The revelation of such a Being must be made on "pneumatic" lines. It is therefore almost inevitable to suppose that Paul explained the experience to himself by means of the idea of the *σῶμα πνευματικόν*, the "spiritual organism," which he postulates for believers in virtue of their connexion with the risen Christ, who is to transfigure their earthly *σώματα* into the nature of His own *σῶμα*, whose quality is *δόξα*.

Several recent investigators, however, such as Wrede, Brückner, and Johannes Weiss, have transferred the emphasis from Paul's conversion to what they call the "Messianic dogmatic" with which he was intimately acquainted in his pre-Christian days. This Messianic theology, they allege, had its focus in the figure of a heavenly Being, a super-human Man, an eschatological creation of Jewish Apocalyptic, involved in the catastrophic conception of the Kingdom of God. He represents the new type of Messiah which has replaced the old, a transcendental Person who is to inaugurate the new Age. As the result of Paul's conviction—a conviction finally shaped in the crisis on the Damascus road—that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the theological construction of his Pharisaic period is fitted to the person of Jesus. Thereby, a history of salvation is formulated. Jesus is the Heavenly Man. His human life is for Paul no more than an episode. All his thoughts of Him, whether as pre-existent or post-existent, are determined by the original dogma of Messiah which was central for his pre-Christian theology.

It is impossible to avoid asking the question: What data do we possess for reconstructing the so-called Messianic dogmatic? Is there any cogent evidence extant? Is there a consistent tradition which may be used as normative? An examination of the existing material reveals the most conflicting phenomena. In some of the documents, the idea of a personal Messiah is prominent. But even there the pictures portrayed are quite irreconcilable. In that section of *Enoch* known as the Similitudes (chapp. xxxvii.-lxxi.) he appears as an obscure eschatological figure, pre-existing with God, described by a variety of names, "Son of Man," "Elect," "Anointed," "Righteous One." It is natural to connect the first of them with Daniel vii. 13 ff., which, however, does not really contain the description of a person

but the symbol of a kingdom, designated in the same context the "kingdom of the saints." It is no more possible to describe this Messiah of the Similitudes as a Heavenly Man than to use such a term of the God in whose presence He is found, who had "a head of days . . . white as wool" (*Enoch* xlvi. 1). When we pass to the *Psalms of Solomon*, written some years later, about the middle of the first century, B.C., the portrait of Messiah is wholly different. It is no longer a pre-existent Being who is to vindicate the Divine purpose. He is to rule on earth, a King made strong by the Holy Spirit of God, free from sin and wise in counsel. Through the fear of God He shall guide His people in works of righteousness. In the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Secrets of Enoch*, each of them assigned to the opening years of the Christian era, there is no mention of a Messiah at all. When, however, we descend to the era following the destruction of Jerusalem, we find in the *Apocalypse of Baruch* and *Fourth Ezra* two Messianic pictures, in various respects akin, in which a personal Figure is again prominent. In the former, a powerful Messiah, who has humbled all that is on earth, is represented as sitting on the throne of his kingdom, and establishing joy and peace and health. Strangely enough, it is said that his rule will last until the world, doomed to destruction, comes to an end (chap. xl. 3). The delineation in *Fourth Ezra* is more difficult to estimate. The Messiah is a transcendental being, seen by Ezra in vision emerging out of the sea, "like the appearance of a man" (*tanquam similitudinem hominis*, xiii. 3: so Syr.: overlooked in the Latin text because the beginning of two consecutive sentences was the same). He is preserved by the Highest for the end of the days (xii. 32). He is described as "My Son, the Messiah" (vii. 28). He will reveal Himself, and give joy to those who survive [the earlier calamities] for 400 years. After these years He will die, as well

as all who have the breath of man. The evidence of this apocalypse is rendered more complex by traces of Christian redaction and interpolation, the limits of which it is hard to determine.

The brief survey which has been given is sufficient to indicate that we cannot speak of a regular "Messianic dogmatic," current in the Pharisaic Schools, with which Paul was familiar as a student of the Rabbis, and which remained central for his religious thought. Often, as in *Enoch* and *Fourth Ezra*, it is difficult to distinguish between symbol and thing signified. Often, the picture of Messiah changes within the compass of a single document. There is nothing even approximating to a normal dogma. We move here in the region of fantastic vision. To reduce its symbolism to theological prose seems entirely irrelevant.

Nor is it helpful to look for light on the elusive figure of the "Son of Man" in *Enoch* or on the "Man" rising out of the sea in *Fourth Ezra*, in the speculations regarding the "original man" which have been handed down in various writings of the Graeco-Roman period. It is true that in certain Hellenistic documents which cannot be accurately dated, such as the so-called "Naassene Discourse," most skilfully disentangled from its Christian setting as found in Hippolytus by Reitzenstein (*Poimandres*, pp. 83-98), we come upon a quasi-deity *ἄνθρωπος* or *ἀρχάνθρωπος*, who is associated with cosmogonic myths, and apparently represents the medium of contact between the highest God and the material world. Philo is acquainted with the tradition, and identifies the *ἄνθρωπος θεοῦ* with the Logos (*De Confus. Ling.*, 411, ed. M). Bousset has, with extraordinary patience, tracked out the doctrine of the *ἀρχάνθρωπος* in Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and the religion of Persia (*Die Hauptprobleme d. Gnosis*, ch. iv.). Of course, much that is hypothetical enters into all these investiga-

tions, but when he comes to deal with Jewish speculations, he appears to me to make most precarious inferences from the very meagre data which are available. It is quite possible that the dim figure of the "Son of Man" in Jewish Apocalyptic may have its roots in the primitive mythology of the "original man." But there are wide gaps in the history of the doctrine which cannot, as yet, be bridged.

It is evident that we are on hazardous ground if we try to associate Paul's conception of the pre-existent Christ with the chameleon-like figure of the apocalyptic Messiah. For the Apostle Christ is the Jesus who died and rose again. That is to say, the historical figure has inevitably given direction to his thoughts. The living person stands clear before his imagination. Hence for him the exalted Lord has, as Olschewski expresses it, "somehow . . . retained human form in an ideal-glorified fashion" (*Die Wurzeln d. paulin. Christologie*, p. 64). But it was Paul's conviction that in Jesus Christ he was brought face to face with ultimate reality. We know how boldly His cosmic functions are set forth in Colossians. They are deductions from His actual victorious achievement as Redeemer, affected, probably, in this form, by the current attempts to explain the contact of God with the world of men. Yet some of the expressions used allow us to make inferences as to a "Heavenly Man." Christ is described as "image (εἰκῶν) of the invisible God," and "first-born (πρωτότοκος) of all creation." How far the Apostle's idea is removed from that of a "man" is plain from the central statement of the passage, that "in him all things hold together" (Col. i. 17)

In one passage Paul makes a definite statement of his conception. In Philippians ii. 6 he speaks deliberately of Christ as "being essentially (ὑπάρχων) in the form (μορφῇ) of God." This "form" He voluntarily exchanged for that of "a slave." His new condition is further defined as "the

likeness (ὁμοιώματι) of men." And, as if to lay emphasis on the contrast, Christ is said to "have been found in fashion (σχήματι) as a man." It is impossible to evade the force of such terms. Here is an account of the Apostle's precise view of the mode of being of the pre-existent Christ. As has been said, he must have worked back to it from the overpowering effect in his experience of all that Jesus Christ had been and had done, and of all that as the exalted Lord He was still accomplishing. But his description, however reached, is quite incompatible with the idea of a "Heavenly Man."<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, "man" is used in a sense so abnormal as to make it a totally misleading vehicle of thought. We have no criterion by which to determine the boundary-lines of Paul's conception. It would be rash to attempt to formulate the type or degree of individuality which he would ascribe to the pre-existent Christ.

We have endeavoured, in this study, to show: (1) that at no point of St. Paul's religious construction does the notion of a "Second Man" stand in the foreground: (2) that when he does refer to Christ as the "Second Man," he is thinking, not of the pre-existent, but of the post-existent Christ, in the light of His Incarnation: (3) that the Messianic data of the apocalypses are insufficient to justify the hypothesis that Paul found in them the basis for his conception of Christ: (4) that, in the light of his express statements, it is impossible to associate with Paul's idea of the pre-existent Christ the notion of a "Heavenly Man."

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<sup>1</sup> Holtzmann's attempt to evade the plain sense of Phil. ii. 6 (*N.T. Theologie*<sup>2</sup>, II. p. 96) is couched in terms which, it is safe to say, the Apostle could not have understood.