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EDITORIAL

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RATIONALISM makes no worse attack upon Christianity than through a certain combination of reverence and denial—a deep reverence for Jesus the man, but a denial of Jesus as Messiah. Many a really thoughtful man has had an admiration for the life and character of Jesus amounting to devotion, but has stopped short of accepting anything beyond the human elements in the record. Such an attitude is not confined to a small class of thinkers, but, more or less vaguely expressed, is that of a surprising number of people generally, both in the church and out. Such articles as that of Dr. Vos meet squarely and ably such a negative attitude toward the Messiahship of Christ. That His Messiahship is bound up in His much admired ethical teaching itself is strongly brought out in this discussion. As Dr. Vos says: “Our Lord speaks not only as authoritative but as sovereign in the sphere of ethics. We feel that His authority in the world of teaching rests on His sovereignty in the world of things.” This paper makes another excellent contribution to these pages by this writer upon the general theme of the Messiahship. In the April issue

THE UBIQUITY OF THE MESSIAHSHIP IN THE GOSPELS

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THAT the Messiahship of Jesus appears with great prominence in the Gospels is plain at first sight. This prominence, however, is of a peculiar character. It cannot be explained from a merely relative weight of emphasis placed upon it in comparison with other ideas. Its prominence is structural, due to the fact that the Messiahship is the central organizing principle of the entire record.

It is the purpose of the writers and of the tradition back of their writing to exhibit Jesus as the Messiah. In the Fourth Gospel this is affirmed with so many words, chapter 20:31: "These [signs] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ." The Synoptic Gospels, if less explicitly, even more eloquently reveal the same interest by their very construction. Matthew opens with the genealogy of "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The superscription of Mark reads "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Though in Luke the genealogy appears at a later point and is traced back to Adam, and through its close coherence with the temptation suggests the conception of Jesus as the last Adam, yet this is not meant as superseding, but only as more broadly formulating the Messianic conception, for the preceding narrative of the nativity keeps in the closest touch with the Davidic promises.

Again in the pivotal events of the Gospel history the Messianic structure of the account becomes quite apparent. The baptism, the temptation, the great Petrine confession, the transfiguration, all stand in the sign of the Messiahship and would become meaningless without the latter. That the passion narrative in which each of the Gospels culminates, and which casts back its light upon the whole preceding story, is of a thoroughly Messianic complexion, needs no special pointing out.

These facts are so patent that they admit of no denial even from the most radical opponents of the Messianic consciousness. The Gospels, not only as we read them, but in the purpose of their writers, are Messianic documents, the Synoptics no less than John. And since these Gospels are the only accessible information concerning the self-estimate of Jesus, it would seem that in regard to this, the central point of His Messianic consciousness, not the slightest room were left for doubt to insinuate itself.

In order to understand the possibility of skepticism in the face of such facts it should be remembered that negative criticism is not willing squarely to plant itself upon the basis of the Gospel record for its understanding of the life and consciousness of Jesus. It appeals first from the written Gospel to the tradition lying back of it, and next from the secondary modified tradition to the purer primitive one, and finally ventures even to cast loose from the latter, to feel its way by historical instinct to the events themselves. Therefore the mere fact that the Gospels are uniformly Messianic in their account of Jesus' career is not to its view decisive. The question becomes: Is this Messianism inherent in the historical reality from the

beginning, or is it something acquired by the tradition in its subsequent course?

The thoroughgoing opponents of the Messianic consciousness assume the latter. According to them the life and mind of Jesus up to His death were untouched by the Messianic idea. The Messianic mantle was first thrown around His figure after this figure had been transformed to the view of His followers by the event of His death and their belief in the resurrection. Afterward this post-resurrection belief was allowed to color and gradually to distort their remembrance of the past. And so only did the Gospel narrative become what it purports to be at present, a documentation of the first stage of the Messianic career of its hero.

How is the critical basis for this theory obtained? The method pursued may be broadly characterized as a process of cross-questioning of the available testimony by means of which it is attempted to show that in this testimony two distinct portraitures of Jesus, with more or less intermingling of colors, reflect themselves. The tradition is a palimpsest, the Messianic writing of the life of Jesus has been superimposed upon something still discernible underneath, and the task of criticism consists in carefully lifting the former from the latter.

The preferential treatment accorded by modern criticism to the Gospel of Mark has had something to do with facilitating this procedure. In Mark the actual, historical facts and the real development of the life of Jesus are believed to have been preserved with comparatively greater fidelity than in Matthew and Luke, not to speak of John. Mark, quite unconsciously to be sure, has written so that something of the interaction of forces that played on Jesus from

within and without can still be traced and some intelligent conception formed of the progress of events. This prepossession of the critics for Mark could not fail to encourage the desire to construe the Gospel history un-Messianically. Mark is the Gospel of action rather than of speech. And, although on the one hand it is precisely in the speech of Jesus that indications of any un-Messianic or pre-Messianic frame of mind are most often looked for, yet on the other hand it is also recognized that precisely in the Gospel discourses the later Messianizing tendency must have found its easiest field of operation and left most of its deposits behind. So far as the Messianic consciousness finds expression in action, Mark stands, of course, on a line with the other Gospels, but actions are more subject to latitude of interpretation than words, so that the necessity of Messianic exegesis is less pressing in regard to them.

Thus at the outset it became possible to consider Mark a less Messianic Gospel and to explain the difference between it and Matthew and Luke from a progressive Messianizing of the tradition. And it was but natural to carry the same principle one step further back. If Matthew and Luke are more outspokenly Messianic than Mark, what hinders from assuming that Mark is already more Messianic in character than an earlier stage of the tradition? And from this there was but one step to the theory that the whole Messianic representation of the earthly life of Jesus was an after-thought in the mind of the church. In this way it may be truly said that the preference for Mark, i. e., the hypothesis that Mark preserves the best memory of the actual course of Jesus' life, has from the beginning played into the hands of the awakening skepticism

in regard to the Messianic consciousness. From Volkmar down to Nathaniel Schmidt the influence of this factor can be clearly traced. From a literary point of view this skepticism has simply followed the line of least resistance.

To say that the course of Gospel criticism has thus invited the doubt or denial of the Messianic consciousness is not equivalent to saying that it actually supports or warrants this. Even on its own premises the criticism in question affords no real ground for questioning the reliability of the Gospel representation. Not at least so long as it pursues valid methods and lets itself be guided by objective principles. If the appearance of a real basis for skepticism has been created it is wholly due to the abandonment of such methods and the ignoring of such principles and the surrender of criticism to the most illegitimate subjectivistic impulses.

Let us try briefly to realize what would be necessary in order to bear out the contention that the Messianic picture of Jesus is a later precipitate injected out of the belief of the church into the original un-Messianic history. In only one of two ways could this be validly accomplished. Either it ought to be shown, on the ground of criteria that have nothing to do with the Messianic question at all, that the Gospel tradition easily divides itself into an earlier and a later stratum, and then further be shown that this earlier stratum, separated from the rest without reflexion upon the Messianic problem, turns out entirely un-Messianic, whereas all the Messianic data happen to appear embedded in the other later stratum. Or, as a second means of reaching the same end, it should be made clear that there is one fixed dogmatic scheme

or principle of representation discoverable which will uniformly account for the subsequent intrusion of the Messianic material into the record, and the presence and working of which are so palpable as to leave no room for reasonable doubt concerning the provenience from that unhistorical source of the entire mass of such material. The second of these two possible modes of handling the question, which is associated with the name of Wrede, we dismiss for the present because it has led rather to agnosticism than to outright denial of the Messianic consciousness, so far as the evidence of the Gospels is concerned, and therefore requires to be considered by itself and judged on its own merits.

Confining ourselves to the first mentioned possibility, we put the question whether, on the lines above indicated, any argument seriously threatening the historicity of the Messianic consciousness has been or can be constructed. The answer to this must be a decided negative. As is well known, long and careful efforts have been made by criticism to reduce our Synoptic Gospels to older sources. Whatever we may think of the result of these efforts, as crystallized in the two-document hypothesis, they can at least claim for themselves a fair degree of objectivity, being based on objective literary features of the documents in question and sufficiently detached from the doctrinal issues involved. Here, then, it would seem, an opportunity is afforded for testing the theory that in an earlier stage the tradition was less pronouncedly Messianic than at the stage in which the Synoptics present it. But the opponents of the Messianic consciousness reveal no eagerness to avail themselves of this test. The reason why is obvious. It is too plain that no

real support for their view can be expected from that quarter.

As for Mark, it was originally thought, and is still thought by some, that here at least the development of events and ideas in the life of Jesus can still be traced, and that in so far this older source is less dogmatically Messianic than Matthew and Luke. Yet this, even if true, cannot alter the fact that Mark not only himself conceives of the Messianic consciousness as uniformly present and active in Jesus' mind from the beginning, but that also the evolution, of which he, quite naïvely and unintentionally, is supposed to have preserved the memory, is not after all an un-Messianic process, but precisely an evolution at the end of which stands the fully matured Messianic idea as the firm possession of Jesus. To get back to Mark, therefore, does not mean to get back of the Messianic tradition. Besides, this whole attitude of discrimination in favor of Mark as the more "historical" less "dogmatic" Gospel, and the reading of Mark's account from the evolutionary point of view, have received a serious blow at the hands of Wrede. Whatever may be thought of the positive side of Wrede's hypothesis, negatively he has at least demonstrated that there is no fundamental difference between Mark and the other Synoptics in point of pervasive, dogmatic Messianism, that, on the contrary, the source of this Messianic structure of the Gospels lies in Mark, and that all that has been discovered in Mark's record of the genesis and development of the Messianic idea is not actually there, but has been read into it.

What is true of Mark is true also of the other source postulated by the two-document hypothesis, the so-called Logia. This Logia source, as reconstructed

by such scholars as B. Weiss and Harnack, taken as a whole and judged as to its underlying intent in the delineation of Jesus, is just as outspokenly Messianic as the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, into which it has been incorporated. If one will take pains to tabulate the evidence for the Messianic consciousness on the basis, on the one hand, of Mark, and, on the other hand, of what Matthew and Luke have in common, discounting everything that is the peculiar property of either Matthew or Luke, the result will immediately show how hopeless it is to seek by way of the two-document hypothesis an approach to an earlier, less Messianized form of the tradition.

So far then as we can objectively observe the process of the Gospel formation, the Messianic character was ingrained in the material from the beginning. To say that the Messianizing transformation, which did not take place where the literary process lies open to observation, must have taken place in an earlier stage where it is withdrawn from our sight is to appeal from the known to the unknown. Where it is attempted to make this plausible in the concrete all objectivity is lost sight of, and the unchecked caprice of criticism is given free play. The method employed—if the use of the word method in this connection be not a euphemism—is to eliminate the Messianic features in each instance separately without regard to common principle. It is a procedure of operating from case to case. Some detached phenomenon, that can be interpreted as rendering a saying or incident suspected, is seized upon and the phenomena thus argued from vary in each case. With all due respect for the honest intent of the critics, one can hardly dismiss the suspicion that their judgment in many of

these cases is influenced by a preconceived antipathy to the Messianic idea; in other words, that in the last analysis not the Messianic element is ruled out because the passages offer just ground for doubting their authenticity, but the passages are suspected mainly because the Messianic idea appears in them. The necessity of resorting to such various disconnected devices of reasoning in so many individual cases tends to destroy confidence in a theory that needs such support. Even granting that in each individual instance considered by itself some sort of case has been made out, yet the number of instances it is necessary to get rid of either by excision or eliminative exegesis is so disproportionately great as to cast discredit on the hypothesis. The argument breaks down by sheer weight of over-ingenious explanation.

There is no critical warrant, then, for expunging the Messianic passages as a later accretion. The most conclusive proof of the unwarrantableness of such a procedure lies in the impossibility of carrying it through to the finish. If the Messianic conception of Jesus had been actually superimposed as a new stratum on the original story of Jesus, then there could be no serious difficulty in lifting it from the latter; a line of cleavage would be reached in the critical operation beyond which the remaining material proved free of all Messianic ingredients. This is not the case. The separating process reaches no natural end; once entered upon it is bound to go on till it has disorganized and destroyed the Gospel tradition for all historical purposes. The reason for this is that the union between the tradition and the Messianism is not geological but physiological; the Messiahship of Jesus belongs to the Gospel in virtue of the very birth of the

latter; it is like the blood or the soul, which no one can take out of the body without inflicting death.

After all the mass of evidence has been neutralized in one way or another by such mechanical treatment, one cannot read the remainder without a strong feeling that the Messianic spirit is still there, intangible perhaps but none the less real. This intangible, imponderable evidence, which no critical knife is fine enough to excise, no critical scales are delicate enough to weigh, is perhaps even stronger in its convincing force than the direct and explicit Messianic deliverances. Jesus appears in the Gospels not merely as occasionally bearing witness to His Messianic dignity, but as throughout silently presupposing it and making it the self-understood basis of the peculiar attitude He assumes toward His environment. In many instances, though none of the Messianic titles occur in the connection, He reveals a consciousness of unique greatness, unique authority, and unique importance, for which nothing short of the Messianic category of self-classification can adequately account. He is more than Solomon, than Jonah, than John the Baptist himself, the greatest born of women. He assumes a sovereign attitude toward the Old Testament institutions in the face of the strictest belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, not hesitating to set aside what God has instituted. He is conscious of bringing something absolutely new, the new cloth, the new wine, of having come to cast a fire upon the earth, to kindle, as it were, the great conflagration that will introduce a new world. He sees Himself standing at the goal of history where all the lines of Old Testament revelation converge; the work of God for Israel, and through Israel for the world, is focused in His Person. He

claims to be the supreme factor in deciding the fate of Israel as well as of individuals, so that His time is the critical time for all who come in contact with Him; acceptance of Him means acceptance of all, rejection of Him rejection of all. He has the right to ask men to follow Him even at the sacrifice of all other things. He relates the deeds of men to Himself, so that what is done to the poor, the sick, the prisoners, is done to Him. And all this without finding it necessary to say a word explicitly about the Messianic office. This silence is more eloquent than any outspoken affirmation could possibly be. And it constitutes that element in the Messianic texture of the Gospels which criticism cannot disturb without unraveling the entire fabric and making it fall to pieces.

Wrede has from his own standpoint most strikingly shown this. According to him, the Messianic mystery is so closely interwoven with the whole account of Jesus already in Mark as to render it a hopeless task to attempt to pierce through it to the reality of Jesus' life. This confession of the inevitableness of historical skepticism in regard to the Gospel history, when its Messianic aspect is discounted, is the strongest witness that can be borne to the organic inherence of the one in the other. What is not Messianic in the tradition is, historically speaking, a useless and negligible quantity.

The view taken does not, of course, imply that all single utterances of Jesus, each taken by itself, necessarily contain a separate reference to or reflection of His Messianic consciousness. It would be plainly absurd to expect this. No official consciousness in any case is bound or likely to reveal itself at every point without exception. The question is simply whether the

tenor of Jesus' self-disclosure, as a whole and viewed in its specific character, attests the consciousness of Messiahship. Side by side with this, sayings may occur that are neutral in a Messianic aspect, simply because they belong to a plane not directly touched by the Messiahship. Jesus occasionally lays down general religious and moral maxims, such as might have been uttered at any time and under any circumstances and are in so far independent of the historical situation He occupies. At this point perhaps the originality of Jesus has been unduly pressed by some. Such utterances may be called un-Messianic, provided only this term be not understood in the sense of exclusive of or antagonistic to the Messianic consciousness. These do not, however, constitute the specific element in our Lord's teaching; they are not what renders it new and unique. They might have been enunciated by some enlightened Jew of that period and were perhaps some of them actually proclaimed by earlier teachers.

The matter would come to stand entirely different if something positively un-Messianic in the sense of anti-Messianic could be pointed out in the tradition. In that case a real dualism would appear to exist, and one or the other of the conflicting elements would have to be thrown out as unhistoric, unless one were prepared to place the contradiction in the mind of Jesus Himself, which, if the conflict concerned important aspects of His work and teaching, would be serious. It is urged by the opponents of the Messianic consciousness that a dualism of this kind palpably exists between the ethico-religious utterances of Jesus representing so important a part of His teaching, and the Messianic self-estimate that finds expression in

another part of that teaching as recorded by the tradition. The objection, it will be observed, is of a psychological nature. Difficulty is experienced in believing that in the same mind two so divergent ideals as the ethico-religious one and the Messianic one can have co-existed. Holtzmann, while not himself yielding to this impression, has strikingly voiced it in the following sentence: "One feels as if over the fair fields of a world of wholesome moral renewal there suddenly began to blow out of regions far removed from all actuality a scorching withering blast of oriental frenzy, and that this, more than aught else, has invited the various efforts, entitled to serious consideration, to cut out the Messianic idea as a diseased foreign body from the otherwise healthful organism of the life of Jesus and hence also to cut it out from the frame of His preaching."

The Jesus thus thought religiously and ethically incapable of harboring within Himself the Messianic consciousness is the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, the great religious genius, the sublime self-forgetful altruist, who puts all His interest into the questions of the subjective spiritual life of man and ignores all questions lying aside of this one thing needful. There is also, some feel, too much self-consciousness and sense of self-importance connected with the Messianic office to go naturally with the ethical idealism ascribed to Jesus. Professor Schmidt in his book on *The Prophet of Nazareth* gives expression to this aspect of the matter. In commenting on the passage, Matthew 11:27, where Jesus declares that all things were delivered to Him of the Father, and that no one knows the Father but the Son, this writer observes:

¹*Lehrbuch der Neutestamentlichen Theologie*, 2d ed., I, p. 308.

"Such an utterance is out of harmony with the admittedly genuine sayings of Jesus and casts an undeserved reflection upon His character * * *. How can the gentle teacher * * * be supposed to have imagined Himself possessed of all knowledge and regarded all other men as ignorant of God?" That is to say, it is in the last analysis the humility of Jesus, as the author apprehends it, that protests against His Messiahship. He could not be a perfect character and make such claims for Himself. Finally, in a mind constituted like the religious mind of Jesus, every preoccupation with the fantastic problems of Messianic eschatology would not only be misplaced but bound to impair in the end the delicacy of the spiritual texture.

One cannot help feeling that in the antagonism to the Messianic consciousness, when asserted on such ground, there is something that, judged from the standpoint of consistency and loyalty to an ideal, deserves appreciation. It is in no small degree the sense of love and allegiance to the figure of Jesus as it lives in the mind of such writers that impels them to doubt and deny what they feel to be dangerous to their own religious conviction concerning the perfection of the Saviour. The reverence for Jesus reflected in this attempt to uphold at all odds the ideal harmony and purity of His inward mind stands, whatever its scientific merit or demerit may be, higher than the cold impartiality that professes itself unconcerned about any loss of character Jesus may suffer at the hands of modern investigators. We ourselves should be loath to sacrifice the purity and delicacy of Jesus' subjective ethical and religious life to anything, even to so important a thing as His Messianic consciousness. But all this

cannot close our eyes to the fact that the conflict supposed to exist at this point is not inherent in the Gospel record itself, but imported into it through the preconceived "liberal" interpretation of Jesus. It is only when, owing to this preconception, the ethics and religion of Jesus are seen through the modern "liberal" spectrum that the colors become inharmonious with those of the Messiahship. As Schweitzer has so strikingly pointed out, this liberal, one-sidedly ethical Jesus, the so-called "historical Jesus," is not really the product of objective critical investigation. From the outset He has had to serve a purpose in the propaganda and defense of "liberal" ideas, and in order to do this He was made to put on the armor of the party that enlisted Him. The "liberals" in the end became unable to see in Jesus anything else but the reflex of their own cherished opinions. Like a Nemesis, Schweitzer observes, this inability has pursued their whole investigation and treatment of the subject. They became more and more obsessed with the idea that they had a mission to perform in writing the life of Jesus. They had to defend the originality of Jesus. But in reality they were engaged in a desperate struggle to reconcile the modern religious spirit with the spirit of the Jesus of the Gospels.

All, therefore, that is needed to meet this charge of dualism between the ethical and the Messianic aspirations of the traditional Jesus is a new and historically more correct reading of the Gospel ethic. If we take our Lord's ethical teaching in a specific sense as a sharply defined historical phenomenon, then it ought not to be difficult to see that there is nothing in it that does not derive its peculiar character from His consciousness of Messiahship. Its differentiating

feature lies in its Messianic complexion. His contemporaries felt this better than the "liberal" theologians feel it. They recognized that His teaching was in authority and not like that of the scribes. It were a mistake to find in this merely the contrast between the rabbinical appeal to tradition and the authoritative mode of speech of the prophet. Much more than this is involved. The authority of Jesus far transcends the self-assurance with which the greatest prophet might have claimed the identification of his word with the word of God. Our Lord speaks not only as authoritative but as sovereign in the sphere of ethics. We feel that His authority in the world of teaching rests on His sovereignty in the world of things. He did not come to propound a new system of ethics as a thinker or a moral genius, but to summon into being a new realm of moral and religious realities, even the Kingdom of God. He stands and speaks out of the midst of a great redemptive movement of which He Himself is the central and controlling factor.

In this profound sense the Messianic consciousness underlies all the high idealism of our Lord's ethics and alone renders it historically intelligible. Not the holding up of a high standard in the abstract, not the preaching that men should be sons of God and perfect as the Father in Heaven and lovers of their neighbors, but the silent assumption that all this has now become possible, and is now about to be realized in a great epoch-making crisis—this is the ethical aspect of the Gospels that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. We notice it in the Sermon on the Mount, not only at the close, where our Lord represents Himself as in the Day of Judgment deciding the destiny of men on the basis of their relation to Himself, but equally at the

beginning, where He links to the fundamental spiritual requirements the absolute eschatological promise—theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, they shall see God, they shall be satisfied with righteousness. Viewed in this light the beatitudes are just as Messianic as the parable of the wise and foolish builders.

And the test can be made everywhere else. We have no groups of sayings of our Lord from which the Messianic spirit thus defined is absent, no traditional material in which He appears divested of this sovereign attitude. His ethical teaching, when rightly interpreted, instead of furnishing an objection to the historicity of the Messianic consciousness, proves the most convincing witness in its favor. It forms no exception to the rule that in the Gospels the Messianic element is not merely prominent but truly ubiquitous and pervasive in its influence.

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