

THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAM

Quinta Press
Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire, England,
SY10 7RN
Visit our web-site: quintapress.com

Layout copyright © Quinta Press 2023.

Taken from 'The First and Second Adam.' *Methodist Review* 98
(New York, May 1916): 347–51.

THE FIRST AND SECOND ADAM

THERE is a way of supplanting the true kingship of Christ which presents Christ as the ideal Humanity in the mind of God. Humanity is the true Son of God, and Christ is great because he is the complete and crowning case of this spiritual Humanity. But he is only representative. In the assembly of ideals he is the member for Humanity, and, after all, it is the constituency that counts. In this view Jesus made of his life a work of such complete moral art that he fully set out man's moral idea, excellence, and resource as a Greek statue does man's formal grace. He acquired his greatness and perfection by moral and spiritual conflict, but, even thereby, only in so far as he realized the idea of Humanity and was the bloom of its intrinsic moral power. This view even makes use of Paul, and recurs to his treatment of Christ as the second Adam completing the first (1 Cor. 15. 45-40). It is a misunderstanding. The point of comparison with Adam is not that the one was in flower what the other was in germ. It is that the new Humanity was as dependent on Christ as the old was on Adam. The act of the one is as determinant of the future as that of the other, and represents a departure at least as new and creative. The passage is not evolutionary at all. The parallel is dominated not by the personality of Christ but by his official or functional place as the originator of an entirely new departure. The second Adam was as creative of the immortal as the first had been of the perishable. The second Adam is of heaven, not the avatar of the heavenly Humanity. He is not the archetype of the old Humanity become flesh, not the earthly precipitate of the heavenly *Urmensch*, but the creator of the new Humanity. The Platonic and Philonic notion of a primal Humanity in heaven, a first to Adam as second, is what Paul was protesting against.

To use the passage for the exhibition of Christ as the racial man, the archetype of a Humanity which, in spite of all lapses, only needs to be true to itself in order to be found in him—such use of the passage is an illustration not only of a mythical idealism

but of a hasty way of reading it into the Bible as poetical ideas. Nay, it is a case of forcing on a passage the very idea it was written to destroy. Paul was not Platonizing but Hebraizing. He was not promoting the current mythologema of an *Urmensch*, an archetypal man, a pattern Humanity in the heavens (analogous to the heavenly Jerusalem preexistent with God and descending on earth). He was correcting the notion for a more Messianic purpose—as his way was with the myths around him. They did not produce his thought, and he did not adopt them; but they gave him an imagery to express his mind. His thought of Christ was produced by the work of Christ; and his idea of Christ's pre-existence especially was the necessary reflection into past Eternity of his redeeming and final glory. Paul's preexistent Christ, therefore, was but the antedating of the historical Son of God for whom the whole creation was destined through the triumph of his cross; he was not the archetype or ideal of Humanity. For, since Humanity is create, Christ would be in that case the incarnation of the create, he cannot be of Godhead; and therefore he was not really an incarnation at all, but rather a precipitate. Or he was an incarnation of man, not to man. He was man coming to himself, not God coming to him. He was not the presence of Godhead in man, but only an avatar or epiphany of ideal Humanity in ail historic man. God was not then in Christ reconciling, but Humanity was in Christ consummating.

Paul is really here combating the view the idealists or gnostics thrust upon him, the philosophic myth of the spiritual or archetypal man in heaven prior to Adam, whereby Philo explained the two accounts of man's creation in Genesis. No, Spiritual Humanity was not first, Paul said, but second. It was not the cause of the historic Christ but his product. The first man was Adam—the race as psychic or natural. The spiritual man, the pneumatic race, was second, created by Christ, not as Christ, and living in him. Christ was not the incarnation of spiritual manhood (which did not as yet exist) but its creator; he was the incarnation of Godhead. Adam became a living soul, Christ became a life-giving spirit to all souls. But Christ never *became* the Son of God. He was only determined as that Son in history, in effective power on

history, by his resurrection (Romans I. 4). For speculative Judaism the first man was the ideal man in heaven and the second was Adam. But this order Paul inverts, while still using the fabulist language—as we do when we speak of Adam at all. The first man was the created Adam, the second was the new Creator, Christ, who, after his victory, from the right hand of God, and especially by his expected return, created and occupied, as its redeeming Lord, the new Humanity. Paul is thus utilizing, but also repudiating, the current philosophic myth of the *Urmensch*. It is of the Hew Humanity that Christ is the head, the Church, which is in Christ, not the natural Humanity, however spiritualized, which is not in Christ. It is only in respect of this new and spiritual Humanity, his own product, that we can speak of Christ as the Head—not in respect of the old and natural Humanity. About Christ's constitutional relation to natural Humanity we can say little or nothing. It is theosophic speculation and not theological revelation. We can say nothing about him as the consummate Head of human nature. We have no information, no data. Human nature does not come out well in the Bible, and it has no promise in it. We can only speak of Christ's moral and practical relation to it as the Redeemer, and as Creator of *the new Humanity out of it*—for which we have both data and experience. The Church is never spoken of as being in Christ in such a sense as if it were a constituent factor of him, as Humanity is declared by idealism to be of God. For Paul, then, the point of comparison between the first and second Adam was that each was not so much a representative as a source—the one of perishability, the other of immortality. Yet Adam was no source of the natural life in the sense in which Christ was the source of the spiritual. Christ was a creative source, Adam only a generative. Christ was a creator, Adam but a germ. Christ created life; the only thing that Adam created was death. And that was not creation but destruction. And Christ *created* life, he did not simply restore it. Each made quite a new departure, one up and one down. Paul's idea, therefore, was not that Christ incarnated the ideal man. He would have shrunk with some horror from such a notion. It would have savored to him of self-salvation—of a historic Humanity saved by

its native ideal, and not by God—unless you gave Humanity an increate and eternal existence in God, which would then be its deification and not its redemption. For Paul it would have been blasphemy to import into Godhead, for subsequent incarnation, a created thing like Humanity. There cannot be a Humanity eternal in God, if Humanity is create.

Paul's idea, therefore, was not that Christ, by incarnating a human factor in God, showed human nature in its full spiritual perfection, and carried its individuals up with him by the spectacle or the process. We could of course read that into Paul; but then his polemic against the Philonic and Judaic first Adam becomes meaningless. And moreover we should have to lay down every objection we ever took to importing philosophemes into the reality of the gospel. For this is surely done when ideal Humanity is thrust into Godhead in order to be reissued as incarnation—if we can speak of incarnation where we should really only speak of precipitation. In Paul's Christ there took place no historic condensation of a celestial ideal, but the self-determining act of Godhead. And in God's purpose spiritual Humanity did not simply date from the historic Christ, nor did it rise to him, but it was absolutely dependent on him—as dependent on him creatively for its great destiny as on Adam destructively for its great doom. Christ was not the ideal of the race, but the action of God's will for it. He was the creative action of God's will rather than the compressed index of God's thought. Paul never used Jesus, the Hew Testament never does, to show the greatness of Humanity, its intrinsic heavenliness, and its soundness at the core; Christ was rather, for Paul and all the Hew Testament, the Messianic action of God to humiliate Humanity, to realize his saving will for a miserable and hopeless Humanity. It is not Humanity that gives Christ his dignity; it is Christ that makes Humanity really divine—really and not poetically divine; and that he did, not as its apotheosis, nor as its classic, but as its Redeemer. He is not the Head and Front of man's natural spirituality, the hero of man's native place in God, but the origin of a New Humanity, with a spirituality which was supernatural in kind because it was due not to regenerative gift and grace. And the high history of the

new race is as much his work as its decay was Adam's. He was thus not the ideal man, but the ideal Redeemer of the ideal man's collapse. And he redeemed not by what he was and infused in his constitution, or "nature," but by what he did in his work and power.

Such is the apostolic teaching as to Humanity in relation to Christ. If it does not seem simple, that only means that we have come in this region to issues which are not to be settled off-hand, nor by amateurs, but under the guidance of those to whom they mean much mental and spiritual labor in the Lord. I dwell on the point as an illustration of the way in which the teacher must be called in if we are to escape the misuse of Scripture. We must work together if any solution is to be had of those questions which are so easily stirred by a religion like Christianity that goes to the bottom of the soul. They are questions which are to be answered not easily, nor without special, and even life-long, pains, by those who serve the Church in this office, and who deserve a respect which it is neither independence nor democracy to refuse. The idea of the Christ, as Jesus used the name, is not the bloom nor the incarnation of Humanity. He was directly neither the revelation nor the perfection of Humanity. He did not arise from man to give full effect to man's resources or possibilities, but he came from God with a mission to give effect to this grace. He came with a calling and an office, with a word to speak and an act to do, such as God alone could speak. What made Jesus to be Christ was what God did in him, what he did for God, what he did to the world, and what the world did to him. He did not live to himself nor to Humanity, but to God's will and work. He came to do something from God's side, and was equipped accordingly; he did not come with a certain humane endowment which had to find a congenial outlet in action. His very person was determined from his saving work, and can only be so understood.