

The Teaching

From what has already been said it is manifest that St Paul did not go about as a missionary preacher merely to convert individuals: he went to establish churches from which the light might radiate throughout the whole country round. The secret of success in this work lies in beginning at the very beginning. It is the training of the first converts which sets the type for the future. If the first converts are taught to depend upon the missionary, if all work, evangelistic, educational, social is concentrated in his hands, the infant community learns to rest passively upon the man from whom they receive their first insight into the Gospel. Their faith having no sphere for its growth and development lies dormant. A tradition very rapidly grows up that nothing can be done without the authority and guidance of the missionary, the people wait for him to move, and, the longer they do so, the more incapable they become of any independent action. Thus the leader is confirmed in the habit of gathering all authority into his own hands, and of despising the powers of his people, until he makes their inactivity an excuse for denying their capacity. The fatal mistake has been made of teaching the converts to rely upon the wrong source of strength. Instead of seeking it in the working of the Holy Spirit in themselves, they seek it in the missionary. They put him in the place of Christ, they depend upon him.

In allowing them, or encouraging them, to do this, the missionary not only checks the spiritual growth of his converts and teaches them to rely upon a wrong source of strength; he actually robs them of the strength which they naturally possess and would naturally use. The more independent spirits amongst them can find no opportunity for exercising their gifts. All authority is concentrated in the hands of the missionary. If a native Christian feels any capacity for Christian work, he can only use his capacity under the direction, and in accordance with the wishes, of that supreme authority. He can do little in his own way; that is, in the way which is natural to him. Consequently, if he is to do any spiritual work he must either so

suppress himself as to act in an unnatural way, or he must find outside the Church the opportunity which is denied to him within her borders, or he must put aside the desire which God has implanted in his soul to do spiritual work for Christ, and content himself with secular employment.¹ If he does the first, he works all his life as a cripple: if he takes either of the two other courses, the Church is robbed of his help. It is almost impossible to imagine that a native 'prophet' could remain within the church system as it exists in many districts. If a prophet arose he would either have all the spirit crushed out of him, or he would secede. The native Christian ministers who remain are those who fall into lifeless submission to authority, or else spend their lives in discontented misery, feeling that they have lost themselves not to God but to a foreign system. Thus the community is robbed of its strength: its own forces are weakened whilst it depends upon the most uncertain of props and the most unnatural. In the result the missionary is left to deplore the sad condition of a Christian church which seems in danger of falling away the moment he leaves it.

If there is a striking difference between St Paul's preaching and ours there is a still greater difference between his method of dealing with his converts and that common among us today. Indeed, I think we may say that it is in his dealing with his converts that we come to the heart of the matter and may hope to find one secret of his amazing success. With us today this is the great difficulty. We can gather in converts, we often gather in large numbers; but we cannot train them to maintain their own spiritual life. We cannot establish the church on a self-supporting basis. Our converts often display great virtues, but they remain, too often for generations, dependent upon us. Having gathered a Christian congregation the missionary is too often tied to it and so hindered from further evangelistic work. This difficulty unquestionably arises from our early training of our converts, and therefore it is of supreme importance that we should endeavour to discover, as far as we can, the method of St Paul in training his. For he succeeded exactly where we fail.

¹ 'At Conferences in three of the principal cities, attended by the leading Chinese pastors and Christian teachers, one of the chief reasons given by them to explain why more of the ablest Christian students do not enter the ministry, was the strong feeling of dissatisfaction with the subordinate position held by native pastors' (Dr Mott, *Decisive Hour*, p. 22).

The first and most striking difference between his action and ours is that he founded 'churches' whilst we found 'Missions'. The establishment of Missions is a peculiarity of our modern methods of which I have already point out many disadvantages in the chapter on finance. Here it must be added that they have not proved themselves in practice to be very convenient or effective instruments for creating indigenous churches. They are intended to be a means to that end. The theory is that the Mission stands at first in a sort of paternal relationship to the native Christians: then it holds a co-ordinate position side by side with the native organization; finally it ought to disappear and leave the native Christians as a fully-organized church. But the Mission is not the Church. It consists of a missionary, or a number of missionaries, and their paid helpers, supported by a foreign Society. There is thus created a sort of dual organization. On the one hand there is the Mission with its organization; on the other is the body of native Christians, often with an organization of its own. The one is not indeed separate from the other, but in practice they are not identified. The natives always speak of 'the Mission' as something which is not their own. The Mission represents a foreign power, and natives who work under it are servants of a foreign government. It is an evangelistic society, and the natives tend to leave it to do the evangelistic work which properly belongs to them. It is a model, and the natives learn simply to imitate it. It is a wealthy body, and the natives tend to live upon it, and expect it to supply all their needs. Finally, it becomes a rival, and the native Christians feel its presence as an annoyance, and they envy its powers; it becomes an incubus, and they groan under the weight of its domination. In the early stages it maintains a high standard of morality, and in all stages it ministers largely to the advancement of the native community by its educational and medical establishments; but it always keeps the native Christians in check, and its relations with them are difficult and full of perils. A large part of modern books on Missions is concerned with the attempt to justify these relations and to find some way of escape from these difficulties. For St Paul they did not exist, because he did not create them. He set up no organization intermediate between his preaching and the establishment of a fully organized indigenous church. It is interesting to speculate what would have happened, if, at the end of his first missionary journey, St Paul had hastened back

to Antioch to entreat for the assistance of two or three presbyters to supervise the growth of the churches in South Galatia, pleading that unless he could secure this help he would be unable to enter the open door which he saw before him; or if instead of ordaining elders he had appointed catechists, keeping the administration of the sacraments in his own hands. From our own experience we can easily guess. But our experience was not his experience, because our practice was not his practice.

The facts are these: St Paul preached in a place for five or six months and then left behind him a church, not indeed free from the need of guidance, but capable of growth and expansion. For example, according to Ramsay, St Paul preached in Lystra for about six months on his first missionary journey, then he ordained elders and left for about eighteen months. After that he visited the church for the second time, but only spent a few months in the province. Then for the last time, after an interval of three years, he visited them again, but again he was only a month or two in the province. From this it is clear that the churches of Galatia were really founded and established in the first visit. The same fact is also clear from the language used in the Acts concerning St Paul's second visit. When he was about to set forth, St Luke says that he proposed to Barnabas to 'go and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do', and he is described as passing through Galatia delivering the decrees of the Jerusalem Council with the result that 'the churches were established in the faith and increased in number daily'. This is not language which could be used as a missionary visiting congregations which could not stand without his presence, or which lacked any of the fundamentals of settled Christian life: it is language which speaks of organized and established communities. Similarly in Macedonia, Professor Ramsay calculates that St Paul did not stay in Thessalonica more than five months, and he did not visit the place again for over five years, yet he writes to 'the church of the Thessalonians'¹ and speaks of it as being on the same footing as 'the churches of God in Judea'.² At Corinth St Paul spent a year and a half at his first visit and then did not go there again for three or four years, but he wrote letters as to a fully equipped and well-established church.

¹ 1 Thess. 1. 1.

² 1 Thess. 2. 14.

Now these are typical examples of his work. The question before us is, how he could so train his converts as to be able to leave them after so short a time with any security that they would be able to stand and grow. It seems at first sight almost incredible. In the space of time which amongst us is generally passed in the class of hearers, men were prepared by St Paul for the ministry. How could he prepare men for Holy Orders in so brief a time? How could he even prepare them for holy baptism? What could he have taught them in five or six months? If any one today were to propose to ordain men within six months of their conversion from idolatry, he would be deemed rash to the verge of madness. Yet no one denies that St Paul did it. The sense of stupefaction and amazement that comes over us when we think of it is the measure of the distance which we have travelled from the apostolic method.

We commonly attempt to alleviate the sense of oppression by arguing, first, that his converts were people wholly and totally different from ours, and, then, that as a matter of fact he did not really leave them, because he was constantly in touch with them by messengers and by letters. In this way we escape from the difficulty, but it is only by blinding our eyes. I have already attempted to describe some characteristics of the society from which his converts were taken. It is quite impossible to imagine or believe that they came to St Paul with any special advantages. If we take the highest possible view of the condition of the people at Lystra, or Thessalonica, or Corinth, a few had some acquaintance with the Old Testament, and the requirements of the Jewish Law, a few had some knowledge of Greek Philosophy, the vast majority were steeped in the follies and iniquities of idolatry and were the slaves of the grossest superstitions. Not one knew anything of the life and teaching of the Saviour. In India and China we are constantly in touch with material as good as any to be found at Lystra. Before now we have received high caste, educated men, before now we have received mortal men endowed with profound spiritual capacities, who would compare well with the best of the people with whom St Paul had to deal. Moreover, our converts today possess one advantage of great importance which was denied to his. Today the whole Bible is printed in the vernacular of nearly every people, and in addition there is a considerable and rapidly-growing theological literature. This advantage is so great that, by itself alone, it should make us

cautious of arguing that we cannot follow the Pauline method because his converts were in a better position than ours.

Neither is it just to minimize St Paul's work by over-estimating the extent of the supervision exercised by the Apostle over his converts by means of letters and messengers. The only possible case in the Four Provinces, on which can be based an argument to guide and direct the organization of a new church for any length of time, arises out of our ignorance of the movements of St Luke from the time at which he arrived at Philippi with St Paul on his second missionary journey till the time at which St Paul met him there on his third journey. St Luke says that 'we', including himself, arrived at Philippi¹ and that 'they', i.e. St Paul and Silas, left for Thessalonica.² Five years later St Paul and his company arrived at Philippi, and the 'we', including St Luke, sailed away to Troas.³ This has seemed to many a sufficient reason for arguing that St Luke was left at Philippi all that time. In that case he must, without doubt, have been a pillar of strength to the church in that place. If that was really the case, it does not affect the truth of the statement that it was not St Paul's usual practice to establish his fellow-workers as ministers to the infant congregations which he founded. If St Luke stayed at Philippi, it was on his own initiative, either, as Professor Ramsay suggests, because he had a house there, or for some other private reason. It is impossible to argue from an isolated and doubtful incident of this kind against the whole course of St Paul's action elsewhere.

St Paul left Timothy and Silas at Beroea, but only for a very short time, with orders to rejoin him as quickly as possible. He sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica. He sent Timothy at least once and Titus two or three times to Corinth. But there is no mention of any messenger being sent to Galatia, and the terms in which these visits of his fellow-workers to Macedonia and Achaia are spoken of, at once reveal the fact that they were not sent to minister to and to educate congregations ignorant of the fundamental truths and incapable of maintaining their own life. St Paul was careful not to lose touch with his new converts. They sorely needed visits and instruction, and they received them. I have no doubt that he was in

¹ Acts 16. 12, 13.

² Acts 17. 1.

³ Acts 20. 6.

constant communication with them by one means or another. But there is an immense difference between dealing with an organized church through letters and messengers and occasional visits, and exercising direct personal government. Visits paid at long intervals, occasional letters, even constant communication by means of deputies, is not at all the same thing as sending catechists or teachers to stay and instruct converts for a generation whilst they depend upon the missionary for the ministration of the sacraments. Nothing can alter or disguise the fact that St Paul did leave behind him at his first visit complete churches. Nothing can alter or disguise the fact that he succeeded in so training his converts that men who came to him absolutely ignorant of the Gospel were able to maintain their position with the help of occasional letters and visits at crises of special difficulty. We want then to consider: (1) What St Paul taught his converts; (2) How he prepared them for baptism and ordination.

(1) I have already tried to set forth the elements of the simple Gospel contained in the public preaching of St Paul. That Gospel involves a doctrine of God the Father, the Creator; a doctrine of Jesus, the Son, the Redeemer, the Saviour; a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling source of strength; but these in the simplest and most practical form.

Besides this St Paul left a tradition to which he constantly refers.¹ In the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians this tradition, as touching two points of Christian practice and doctrine, is set forth in some detail. We see there that the teaching on the Holy Communion involved a careful statement of the institution of the rite and of the manner in which it was to be observed;² we see that the teaching of the resurrection included an account of the appearances of the Lord to the disciples after His death, beginning with the appearance to St Peter and ending with the appearance to St Paul on the Damascus road.³ Hence we may conclude that the doctrine involved in the preaching was reinforced, in the tradition delivered to converts, by more or less detailed teaching of the facts in the life of Christ upon which the doctrine rested.

¹ 2 Thess. 2. 15; 3. 6; 1 Cor. 11. 12; 11. 23; 1 Tim. 6. 20; 2 Tim. 1. 13; 2. 2; 3. 14; Tit. 1. 9.

² 1 Cor. 11. 23-6.

³ 1 Cor. 15. 3-8.