

## CHAPTER 1

# *The Impulse*

WE are sometimes surprised that men who call themselves the servants of Christ appear to be wholly unmoved by the command of Christ to preach the Gospel to all nations. The command is clear; it is repeated again and again.<sup>1</sup> Christians do not question its authority; they do not doubt that Christ gave it; they do not doubt His right to give it; they simply disobey it. The command does not come home to them. It does not appear to have any binding force. This seems strange. We think that the mere repetition of the command should be enough.

I. When we so think or speak we are treating the command of Christ as if it were a law of the same order as the laws of Judaism or of any other legal system. But there is a difference between the commands of Christ, the laws of the Gospel, and the commands of

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. Xxviii, 19-20; St. Mark xvi, 15; St. Luke xxiv, 47; St. John xx, 21; Acts i, 8.

the Law. It is a difference not of form but of essence. The commands of the Law are external, the commands of the Gospel are internal. The commands of the Law are given from without, the commands of the Gospel are implanted. It is the promise of the Old Testament, "I will write my laws in their hearts"; the fulfilment of the promise is found only in the New Testament.

The fact that there are in the Old Testament some commands which seem to anticipate the Gospel, and that in the New Testament there are some commands which seem to belong in character to the Old Testament does not invalidate this distinction any more than the fact that some members of the vegetable kingdom possess characteristics proper to the animal kingdom and that some members of the animal kingdom possess characteristics proper to members of the vegetable kingdom invalidates the distinction between the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

(a) Divine laws are the expression in words of the will of God for man. Under a legal system it is the external form, the word, which is communicated to men. So expressed the Spirit is limited by the weakness of human speech. A Spirit once set down as Law is necessarily imperfect. The word fixes an arbitrary standard, a definite point, a maximum or a minimum, above or below which action is forbidden. Under Law the command is bound up with the Letter, the written word. The Letter is the standard. But in Gospel this is not so. Under Gospel it is the Spirit which is communicated. In Gospel the Spirit is the standard. Gospel law is not a form of words: it is an ideal with no fixed point. In Gospel any expression in words is subject to the Spirit. Consequently the very verbal

expression changes its content to the eye of the soul as the soul more and more realizes the impulse of the Spirit.

This does not alter the fact that in Gospel there are points below which a man cannot fall without revealing that he has not the Spirit. The Spirit in the Body recognizes such points. There is a point at which failure proclaims that a man has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. But even this is not a fixed point. It varies from age to age and from place to place.

If the command to go into all the world were a command of the Law it would be bound by the letter of the words “go” and “the world.” Certainly it could be obeyed only by physical and material “going.” But the “going” demanded by the Spirit is essentially a spiritual process which is far wider and fuller than any material going. Men do not necessarily “go into all the world” when they go as missionaries to China or to Africa, or to any other place. It is possible to be as “narrow” in Africa as in one’s native village. It is possible to circumnavigate the globe without “going into the world” at all. Spiritual going is not less real than physical but more real. Christ came into “the world” though He walked in the flesh in Palestine alone. We ought to “go” as Christ “came.” It is because we do not think of this, because we treat the command as the law of a legal system, which sets up a standard bound by the letter, that we do not understand it. We see that as it stands literally it is impossible. How often do we hear it quoted with the commentary, “Of course we cannot all go.” We do not therefore leap for joy in the presence of a spiritual truth revealed to us. We speak as if a man who goes physically to some foreign country fulfils the command more *really* than

the man who stays at home. We whittle it away. We interpret “go” as “send” or “give.” We sometimes speak of “a substitute,” as if one soul could do another soul’s duty, as one man under a legal system here on earth might serve as substitute for another in military service. Of course I do not deny that acts of “going” or “giving” or “sending” may all be expressions in outward form of a real spiritual “going.” Of course they may be. But the command is not “obeyed” by these outward acts. “Go ye into all the world” is not a legal phrase local and temporal which can be so obeyed. The Spirit is not bound by material local and temporal chains, any more than by the letter of a law. We miss much, I fancy, by this material form of speech. I wonder what would happen if we all went “into all the world” in the places where we were born or to which the Spirit might carry us, receiving a world-wide Spirit and expressing a world-wide Spirit wherever we might be. That many of us would move about the world is as certain as that Christ moved from Galilee to Judaea; but wherever we were we should go into all the world.

(b) Obedience to the commands of the Gospel is a spiritual act. The Gospel law is a law of liberty, that is, a law of internal life not of external compulsion. It is the law which rules the active expression of a spirit making its own proper free response to the will of God. This was the obedience of Christ. Christ says: “As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.”<sup>1</sup> How then did the Father send the Son? By a command? Certainly by a command. Christ speaks of a command, “As the Father gave Me commandment even so I do.”<sup>2</sup> But not by an external command. Christ speaks more often of a community of will,

<sup>1</sup> St. John xx, 21.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xiv, 31.

“My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.” The Father sent the Son by a command; but the command was a Procession of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of the Father who sent was the Spirit of the Son who came. The command was an expression of the Spirit and the response was the expression of the same Spirit; because there was community of Spirit; for the Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son. So Christ sends His people into the world not by an external command only; but by a giving of the same Spirit, “He breathed on them.”<sup>1</sup>

Obedience is the acceptance of this gift, the surrender of ourselves to this Spirit. Legal commands do not demand this internal surrender, this acceptance of a gift, as the condition of their fulfilment. All that they require is external obedience. If the outward act is not in contradiction to the letter of the law, the internal condition is not regarded. Willing obedience and unwilling are alike obedience. A legal system is a slave driver. If what the slave driver demands of the slave is done, he cares not for the motive from which it is done. But unwilling obedience to Gospel commands is not obedience at all. It is indeed a contradiction in terms. Obedience to the command to preach the Gospel to all nations except as an expression of the Spirit of Christ indwelling the soul is an absurdity, a contradiction of itself.

(c) Legal commands do not demand this internal surrender, this acceptance of a gift, as the condition of their fulfilment, because they have no such gift to offer. An external command cannot be an impulse, a motive for action. A command may suggest a motive, but it is not, and cannot be, a motive in itself. A command is a stick,

<sup>1</sup> St John xx, 22.

or a whip, which appeals to some feeling which can respond to it, just as the nervous system responds to a blow. A command presupposes a spirit which can respond to its appeal; but whilst it presupposes a spirit to which it can appeal, it does not presuppose the spirit of the command. The law is not made for the righteous man, but for the unrighteous. Therefore the law appeals to some motive which can produce the right action; but which is not itself the spirit of the right action. The law is made because the spirit of the right action is absent, and therefore the right action would not be taken without some other appeal. Hence the Law rests upon sanctions. It endeavours to lead men into the right path by threatening them with punishments if they transgress, or by promising them rewards if they obey. In this way Law substitutes some other motive for the spirit of the command.

The Gospel on the other hand supplies the motive. In the Gospel, the Spirit which expresses Himself in the command is given to the soul to whom the command is addressed. The command is an expression of the mind of the Spirit. It is an instruction in the character of the Spirit given. Thus in the Gospel the command does not appeal to another motive which is not the spirit of the command. In the New Testament the Gospel is the offer of a free gift of grace. Those who refuse it remain under law and its threats; those who accept it are no longer under law, they are under grace. The threats of the Gospel are addressed not to those who receive the grace, but to those who reject it and refuse to follow it. They are rather warnings of the consequences of refusing the grace. Thus under Gospel there are no sanctions. To those under grace it threatens no punishment other than the terror of falling from grace:

it offers no reward to those who accept it other than its own fulfilment, which is their supreme bliss.

So the command to preach the Gospel has no sanction. It is clearly associated with the promise of the presence of Christ with His people, "Lo I am with you always";<sup>1</sup> with the gift of power from on high, "Ye shall receive power";<sup>2</sup> with the coming of the Holy Ghost, "He shall bear witness, and ye also shall bear witness";<sup>3</sup> but the promise of the presence of Christ, the gift of the indwelling Spirit, is not a reward offered to those who obey: it is the assurance that those who are commanded will be able to obey. It is the promise of the motive power to which the command appeals. The voice of Christ without the soul speaks to the Spirit of Christ within the soul. Christ first gives the Spirit and then the command. He first comes to us, and then commands us to go.

This manner of command is peculiar to the Gospel. The essential characteristic of the Gospel is that it is an administration of the Spirit. On the reality of this coming of the Holy Ghost turns not only the whole meaning and purpose and manner and power of Foreign Missions; but the very existence and character of our religion. We do not propagate a new system of theology and ethics, because the Gospel which was preached to us was not a new system of theology and ethics. It was because St. Paul would never for one instant allow that the Gospel which he preached was such a system, that his whole life was one long martyrdom.

(a) It is by this that Christianity is separated from all other religions. It stands apart, in a class by itself, distinct from all others, not merely in the fulness of its truth and

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xxviii, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Acts i, 8

<sup>3</sup> St. John xv, 26-27.

the height of its moral teaching, but in its essential character. Christ did not merely impart a doctrine more true, more exalted than Moses, or Confucius, or the Buddha or any others who had preceded Him. He did not merely introduce a new understanding of the Nature of God and of the manner of approach to Him. He imparted His own Spirit, He implanted His own Divine Life in the souls of His people. The others gave commands; they taught with more or less truth what men ought to be and do, and their systems may be compared one with another because they are in the same order. But it is impossible to compare a system of directions with a Spirit. It is impossible to put into the same class, commands and motives. They gave commands: Christ gives motive power. They told men what they ought to do: Christ imparts the Spirit from which the command emanates. Their commands remained an external burden to be taken up with sorrow and laid down with despair: Christ gives an internal power which grows stronger and stronger and works out our salvation in Him. They gave words: Christ gives Himself. The one thing that is vital for the Christian is not wisdom, nor ritual observance, but union with Christ. The one thing for which Christians pray, the one thing which in the last resort is needful, is that Christ shall dwell in our hearts. In that Presence lies the secret of life, of power, of service, of response to the commands of Christ.

Nearly all the objections commonly raised against Foreign Missions have their root in a fundamental objection to this supreme claim of Christ, to this essential character of Christianity. The Jews rejected Christ and His righteousness because they preferred their own righteousness, the righteousness which men think to claim as their own as the results of their own efforts to keep Law. We to-day accept Christ in name, but we often reject

His grace and refuse His righteousness in our thought and speech and deed. When men talk of the Christian missionary as a man who goes about to persuade others that the religion in which they were brought up is a bad one and that the religion which he teaches is a better; when they say that Eastern nations have religions which are good for them, whilst we in the West have a religion which is good for us; when they question the value of educating the natives of any country in our religion on the ground that they cannot understand, appreciate, or follow it properly; they are treating Christianity as a system of ethics and theology, better perhaps than the systems of the non-Christian world, at least for us, but essentially of the same order. In other words they are not speaking of the Gospel at all, but of a philosophical and legal system. The Christianity of the Apostles was not such. For them the one thing of vital necessity for the salvation of souls was that they should receive the Spirit. All righteousness, all hope of righteousness, had its source and spring in the indwelling Spirit of Christ the righteous.

(b) This is the essential character of the Gospel and therefore I suppose it is that, in this matter of spreading the Gospel, St. Paul never appeals to the command of Christ. This has seemed strange to many. But it is only an illustration of the attitude of the Apostle to all Law as Law.<sup>1</sup> His conception of the Gospel as a dispensation of Spirit forbade him to rely upon the letter of any command. Even in cases where there was danger of gross immorality he did not appeal to law as providing a motive for right conduct. He appealed to the Spirit, "Know ye not that your body is a Temple of the Holy Ghost?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Missionary Methods*, ch. x.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vi, 19.

Because the missionary command is a command of the Gospel not of the Law, it would appear to be a mistake to speak of the missionary work of the Church as a duty based upon a command, or of the evangelization of the world as an obligation laid upon the Church by her Lord, as though this duty or obligation in any sense depended upon any particular word of the Lord.

(a) In that case, if it were ever possible that it could be shown that the Lord gave no such command, or if Christians began seriously to doubt whether He ever used this or that particular form of words, then the obligation and the duty would perish with the letter of the command. But that is absurd. It would be far more true to say that had the Lord not given any such command, had the Scriptures never contained such a form of words, or could Christians blot it out from their Bibles and from their memories, the obligation to preach the Gospel to all nations would not have been diminished by a single iota. For the obligation depends not upon the letter, but upon the Spirit of Christ; not upon what He orders, but upon what He is, and the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Divine love and compassion and desire for souls astray from God. The command appeals to that Spirit. But to turn from the Spirit and to appeal to the command, is to transpose the whole order and meaning of the Gospel. It is to appeal to the dead for life, to expect from an external command the virtue of an internal motive. It is to misuse the word of the Lord.

(b) To rely upon the letter of the command is to make that appear to be arbitrary which is really essential. A command which has no authority except the word of him who utters it is an arbitrary command. It need not have been uttered. It is conceivable that change of circumstances might lead to its withdrawal. It does not belong to the

essential order of things. So it used to be argued that the obligation to preach the gospel to all nations ceased with the miraculous gifts of the Apostles. But Christ's command is not arbitrary. It could not have been unuttered. It is the voice of the Spirit of Christ in Him and in us. If the Spirit had not spoken through His mouth, He would still be speaking in our souls. If Christ had not said "Go into all the world," the word "Go into all the world" is so manifestly the expression of the Spirit of the Incarnation that whoever had first uttered it would have been instantly recognized as the mouthpiece of the Spirit. The whole Church would have accepted it as the voice of the Lord. The Spirit is prior to the letter. The letter does not create the Spirit but the Spirit the letter. And it could not change with changing circumstances, because though the circumstances may change the Spirit does not change. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. And the Spirit of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of sacrifice. The Spirit which proceeds, goes, eternally goes forth in sacrifice, as a Spirit of Love which eternally desires and strives for the welfare of all.

Nevertheless we are constantly tempted to base our appeal for help in missionary work upon the letter of the command. This is easy, because in form Gospel commands necessarily have an appearance of legality. "Go into all the world," "Do this in remembrance of Me," seems as legal as, "Thou shalt drive out the Hittite," or, "Thou shalt keep the Passover." Both as expressed in words are necessarily bounded by the weakness of human speech. The gift of the Spirit cannot be expressed in legal form, and we naturally tend to look on the outward things. Consequently we take the word for the Spirit.

When we do this we destroy the very foundations upon which alone any successful issue can be built. We destroy

the Gospel command and make it legal. It actually becomes that which we make it. The moment that we treat a command of the Gospel expressed in words as a form of words, we make it an ordinance of the Law. The legal mind transmutes the object of thought. The command ceases to be Gospel and becomes Law.

But as legal the command is weak; as St. Paul says all law is weak through the flesh. It cannot be a motive; it cannot give life; it is a burden. It has not even the support of a sanction. As Gospel, the commands “Do this,” “Go ye,” are God’s windows through which the Spirit shines; as legal they need the added terror, “If any man obey not, that soul shall be cut off. He hath broken my covenant”; and there is no such added terror. What wonder if they are disregarded! As legal they have no spiritual force. It is the service of the Law to convict men as transgressors, not to save them.

(c) So men break, so men always have broken the law to the grief and disappointment of the priests of the law. We fail to see that the failure is the natural result of the system. We are often surprised to find that, in doing what we most deplore, men are acting strictly in accordance with the principles which we have inculcated. We did not anticipate that their action might be as natural a consequence of the mode of our presentation of the truth as the action which we imagined must inevitably follow. Here, for instance, if we treat the command “Go ye” as an external direction, if we bow to it ourselves as an external direction, we expect all others to do the same. But to our dismay when they hear it they do not bow to it. They do not even pay it the attention necessary to evoke a positive refusal to obey. They treat it as an external direction, just as we did. They put it on one side because it is an external direction which does not appeal to them,

and is destitute of any powerful sanction. To us the command is a whip, or a goad. To them it is a whip without a lash, a pointless goad.

We invite this response when we treat that as legal which is really spiritual. The command is not obeyed as a legal command, because it is not a legal command; it is not obeyed as a spiritual command, because the Nature of the Spirit is not explicitly realized and taught.

The Spirit which Christ imparts is the Spirit of which this command is the proper expression. He is the Spirit of the command. The command is a missionary command, the Spirit is a missionary Spirit. The first lesson which we learn in our earliest childhood about the Lord is that He, the Divine Son, dwelling in the Light which no man can approach unto in the bosom of the Father, was impelled by that Spirit to abandon the glory of Heaven and to come down into the world in order to bring back in Himself souls that had gone astray from the Father. All His life and all His work, as it is seen in the Holy Bible, is the exhibition of that Divine compassion and desire, the working out of that Divine purpose. It is that Spirit which He brings into the souls of those who are united to Him. The history of the saints is the history of that Spirit striving to realize itself in acts similar to His, in the willing sacrifice of men seeking by all means to bring back to the Father in Christ those who were lost in misery and sin. Therefore it is that Christianity is essentially a missionary religion. It is impossible for men to receive Christ into their souls and not to receive that Spirit.

That Spirit is a world-wide all-embracing Spirit. To Christ there are no bounds. To speak of the Lord who stretched out His arms upon the Cross as though He embraced in those arms but a portion of the human race is

to destroy Christ. It is to make Him a local deity, or a mere human teacher, a demigod, or a Jewish prophet. If Christ does not save the whole world He can save none. If my belief that Christ loved me and died for me is not based upon the truth that He loved the whole world and died for the whole world, and that as I am a part of the world, He loved me and died for me, it is based upon a foundation of self-conceit and vanity, upon racial or personal pride. He whose Spirit cannot embrace all cannot embrace any. A limited Saviour is a contradiction in terms. But if the Spirit of Christ is all-embracing, the Spirit which we receive is all-embracing; for we receive Christ. The Spirit given to us is the Spirit of the command, and the command like the Spirit is world-wide.

The Spirit which Christ imparts is the Spirit of the command. It is impossible for men to be in communion with Christ, it is impossible for Christ to dwell in their hearts by faith, and they not to have the Spirit which is the Spirit of the Incarnation. There dwells in them the Spirit Who led the Son of God to give up the very glory of Heaven in order to bring back the world to the Father in Himself. If Christ dwells in men, that Spirit dwells in them. If that Spirit is not in them, then Christ is not in them. There is no escape from this dilemma. If the Holy Spirit is given, a missionary Spirit is given.

How then does it come to pass that men who are communicants and otherwise devout members of the Church of Christ are yet sometimes open opponents of foreign missions? Surely this is only one aspect of a difficulty with which we are all most familiar. We are greatly tempted to deny the presence of the Spirit if we do not see those manifestations of the Spirit which our experience has taught us are proper and natural expressions of His nature. Other manifestations or manifestations

which, though of the same order as those which we expect, are very slight, escape our observation. At birth we expect a child to manifest life, if he has it, in forms of expression which our experience has taught us are common and natural. If we fail to see those signs of life we may deny that the child is alive, and yet a trained nurse or a doctor may be able to discover signs of life, and with careful nursing the child may grow up to healthy manhood. Possession of life and conscious realization of the life and active manifestation of it are not identical. So reception of the Spirit and conscious realization of the Spirit are not identical. Reception of the Spirit is a fact, realization and manifestation of the Spirit is a process.

This is why many are tempted to deny the grace of sacraments. We are taught that in the sacraments the Holy Spirit is given. Yet the manifestations of the working of the Holy Spirit may not follow as we expect. Seeing this, men say "The grace is not given. If the Spirit were there, the fruits of the Spirit must appear. "But the grace may be quenched, or unnurtured. It may be neglected, unrealized, unexercised, undeveloped. Many children really alive perish for want of proper observation and care.

Even in normal cases where a new-born infant shows clearly the first signs of life, nurture and education are necessary. The life so given left to itself could not survive for more than a very short time. The child must grow by degrees to learn the nature and purpose and character of the life which it possesses and of the environment in which it is to exercise that life, so that it may attain to full development, and may use its powers for its own growth and not for its destruction. Just so the newly baptized child has the Holy Spirit, but it has little knowledge of the nature of the Spirit. What is needed is knowledge.