

# Modern Mystical Teachings and the Word of God

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## Note to the Reader (ca. 1950)

The first edition of this pamphlet appeared in 1922, and for along time has been out of print. As the years have passed, however, the school of teaching, which we then examined briefly, has proceeded to further extravagancies, and the assertion of doctrines even more fundamentally false; so much so that a call has come for its re-issue.

This has involved considerable additional matter, and the omission of some things that appeared in the earlier edition. The omitted portions were considered of lesser gravity, and for that reason only were expunged, so as to avoid any large increase in size.

All the extracts we cite are taken from publications of the last 40 years, though a few have only appeared very recently. The roots of this false teaching, however, can be traced a good way further back than 40 years, to a time when many brethren adopted the idea that God always has one particular man for the moment, to whose utterances peculiar value must be attributed. This idea soon reacted badly upon the individual who was considered to be the teacher for the moment, and in course of time he was incited to put forth novel things in an unbalanced way. These unbalanced teachings were hailed as new light by his followers. And so the process developed and enlarged until the teacher for the moment became invested with almost papal authority by his admirers.

The evil fruits of this movement are becoming increasingly plain. Teachings false to the vital fundamentals of our holy faith are being promulgated, and the end is not yet. Let us be warned. Scripture exhorts us to “shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2: 16).

## The Features that Characterize Mystical Teachings.

First of all it may be well to define the term we use.

What is mysticism?

It deals largely with ourselves, and our own state and apprehension of the truth. It is occupied not with divine realities themselves, but with how **we** become conscious of those realities, and of the way they work out certain results in us.

The Word of God deals with the state of His saints. It throws light upon the progressive work of the Spirit in our souls. All this truth, which we speak of commonly as **subjective**, is of great importance, and we do well to maintain it, firmly holding it in its true connection with the great **objective** realities themselves, since every action of the Spirit within us subjectively is in strict accord with the objective reality by which He works.

Mysticism, however, does not preserve the Scriptural order and balance as between these two sides of truth. In its eyes the subjective side appears so great that the objective realities are largely obscured. We say **largely** because it does not deny God's revelation in Christ, nor the reality of the work He accomplished for us, nor that which He will yet accomplish for us at His coming again. It admits these things theologically, and then relegates them into the background of the picture in order that the foreground may be the more effectually occupied with the Spirit's work within us. Consequently to the mystic this subjective side of things becomes the only thing worth consideration. The consciousness of the thing becomes in his thoughts virtually the thing itself. He talks therefore continually about his consciousness, his apprehension, his experiences; which is only another way of saying he is wrapped up in himself. He speaks of Christ, but views Him as the One, who produces these impressions.

Nor is this all. If people could be found marked only by these characteristics, it is doubtful if the term "mystic" could be properly applied to them. The essence of mysticism lies in this, that the seat of authority is transferred in the mind of the mystic from the external Word of God to the spiritual consciousness — the "spiritual man" — internal to themselves. Homage of quite an orthodox kind may be verbally rendered to the Scriptures, and yet they may be largely displaced. The spiritual conception of the mystic, who flatters himself that he is indeed a spiritual man, are all important to him. He soars above and beyond the Scripture. Its letter he disdains, even if he does not speak against it. It has little or no restraining effect upon the flights of his imagination. He quotes it of course, but only as supporting or illustrating or adorning his own conceptions of truth. His conceptions become the primary thing on which the main emphasis must be laid. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of those conceptions, and its words become of secondary importance.

At the opposite pole to mysticism lies a cold orthodoxy devoid of power. It is sadly possible to insist correctly on all the great objective verities of the faith without much exercise of conscience as to a positive entrance upon these realities in the power of the Spirit of God. Truth may thus be stated and Scripture correctly expounded without the warmth of the love of the truth. In this frame of mind people seem to fear what is subjective and experimental in ministry as though it in some way robbed them of truth itself, instead of it being only calculated to divest them of an easy-going mental acceptance of truth and of the self-complacency which goes with it, and plunge them into genuine exercise of heart before God. In all this tendency there is something poor and shallow, and earnest souls are by it repelled.

Mysticism has about it an apparent profundity of thought and utterance. It promises a far greater

depth of understanding, which is alluring, and especially to minds of a certain contemplative type, fundamentally disposed towards introspection and self-occupation. Though the present age is one of turmoil and shallow reasoning, mysticism still makes its voice heard, and by its very contrast offers certain attractions. Hence we believe a few words of warning may be profitable, especially as its ultimate tendencies have always been towards not only indefiniteness of doctrine and statement, but to the maintenance of teachings quite foreign to and astray from the Word of God. As before, so again it has led to grave and fundamental error.

During past years books and magazines, wherein a certain form of modern mysticism is expounded, have come into our hands. Some of these are enumerated below, and any quotations from them in the text will be referred to under the respective letter allotted to each, so that space may be saved.

1. The Body; Holding the Head, and Union. — J.T.

2. How the Truth of the Assembly appeared in the Development of God's Ways, etc. — J.T.

C. Notes of Meetings in Chicago, January, 1919.

D. The Believers' Friend, July, 1920.

E. Mutual Comfort, 1920 volume.

F. The Movements of the Testimony. — J.T.

G. The Way. — J.T.

H. Names of Divine Persons. — J.T.

I. The Sonship of Christ. — J.T.

J. Inscrutability. — J.T.

K. Notes of Readings in New York, 1939. — J.T.

L. The Testimony of Grace and Judgment.

M. Words of Grace and Comfort.

In many of these initials appear indicating various speakers. As, however, what is of importance and interest is not the speakers, but the truth or falsity of the views expressed, we have omitted many initials in the extracts quoted. We now proceed to deal with some of their salient features.

2.

## **The Eclipse of Objective Realities by One-Sided Subjective Impressions corresponding therewith.**

This feature is very strongly emphasized. The great idea running through these mystical publications is the ALL-importance of the subjective as contrasted with the objective. This is elaborated and reiterated in many ways with great expenditure of words, consequently the only difficulty is to find it expressed in sufficiently compact form for quotation.

The following is an example:-

“Many have the Spirit, and are in the body [**of Christ**] from the divine side, but practical obligations here are not met, and therefore the thing is null and void to such.” (A. p. 4).

This is a pretty clear example of the teaching. The fact of believers having the Spirit, and thus being baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12: 13), is admitted. Yet it is admitted only to be dismissed as “null and void” to all such as do not meet their practical obligations here. On a previous page we are enlightened as to what is meant by the phrase, “practical obligations”:-

“God commends Himself to us, that is His side, now what can you be for God? So you take up the covenant, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in you; you begin at the bottom.” (A. p. 2 & 3).

Here the allusion is to Romans 8: 4, where God's triumph in Christ is contrasted with the weakness of the law. The law could neither produce that which it demanded, nor condemn the root principle of sin, which was unrestrained by its demands. It could only condemn the open acts of transgression, and curse the transgressor. God, by the sacrifice of His own Son for sin, has both condemned sin in the flesh, and secured the fulfilling of the law's righteous demand in those walking, not according to flesh, not even according to law, but according to Spirit. It must be confessed with sorrow that many saints, who possess the Spirit, walk but little according to Him, and are little troubled as to their failure. This verse, however, states **normal** Christianity. It must also be confessed that none of us, not even the most spiritual, walk **altogether** according to Spirit, and thus **altogether** fulfil what the law righteously demands.

The extract we have quoted gives us no quarter, inasmuch as the statements are made dogmatically, and without qualification. Have we met these practical obligations? Do we walk according to Spirit, thus fulfilling the righteousness of the law? What can we say? Have we happy experience of the delivering power of the “Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”? Yes, thank God! Yet alas! in many things we all offend, and we cannot flatter ourselves that we have “met our obligations.”

The author we have just quoted, however, wishes us to believe that if we are not subjectively in thoroughgoing accord with the objective reality, then to us the objective reality is “null and void,” i.e., nothing and empty, of neither force nor meaning. Truly, as we have said, the objective reality disappears, quite eclipsed by the overpowering importance of the subjective impression.

A little further on the author says:-

“I think we ought to be very simple about righteousness. The Spirit enables us to fulfil every moral obligation. There is no progress made in our souls unless these obligations are fulfilled.” (A. p. 11).

“The great point in Romans is the fulfilling of the responsibilities of the creature — man — towards the Creator.” (A. p. 14).

These words emphasize his standpoint. Until we reach subjectively the state he has in view, we are doomed to no progress, i.e., as the context shows, to no entrance into “assembly truth” as unfolded in other epistles. It is as if the subjective knowledge of truth is divided into diverse spheres, which must be completely passed through in a certain order, and we are left with the impression that however we may be ourselves conscious of failure, the speaker himself, at least, can lay claim to the requisite subjective condition.

The second quotation shows that to him, the subjective effect produced by the Gospel is the great point. On the contrary, we venture to affirm that the great point in Romans is the “Gospel of God,” which brings God in, acting both in righteousness and love for the deliverance of men from the grip of evil, to be for His pleasure both now in the midst of a groaning creation, and ultimately in a redeemed creation. The subjective work of the Spirit comes in incidentally to this.

Yet again he says:-

“It is of the utmost importance that, if you take things subjectively, we have nothing but what we have grown into, and that is by the work of the Spirit. On the gift side you have everything.”

It is indeed by the work of the Spirit that we grow up into the truth and possess it in power, but it is also true that no one is a Christian at all, nor possesses the Spirit, unless the subject of a mighty work of the same Spirit. Of the Spirit we are born (John 3: 6-8). There is consequently about us an “inward man” (Rom. 7: 22; 2 Cor. 4: 16). Through the Spirit there is soul-purification “unto unfeigned love of the brethren” (1 Pet. 1: 22). Indeed, “we live in the Spirit” (Gal. 5: 25) and upon this fact the exhortation to walk in the Spirit is based. It is quite true therefore to say that we have nothing apart from the work of the Spirit. It is not true that we have nothing “but what we have grown into,” for we have all that which is the fruit of the Spirit's initial work before we begin to grow at all. One might feel somewhat comforted by the admission that on the gift side we have everything, save that one remembers that we have just heard that apart from the proper subjective response the objective reality becomes “null and void”. This last extract would lead us to suppose that the great initial work of the Spirit in the soul is really nothing! The “inward man” is something we **have**, rather than something we **are**, — and yet our author says “we HAVE NOTHING but what we have grown into.”

Judging from previous experiences with this line of teaching, we quite expect that our remarks would be met by some disclaimers, and we suspect the author does not quite mean all he says. We can only, however, deal with what he does say.

“Formative” with its variations is a much used word in connection with the Spirit's work. For instance:-

“In John's epistles the saints are viewed as formed in the divine nature.” (A. p. 17).

“Having the Spirit is the very necessary equipment for the formation of Christ, but it does not say [Rom. 8] that you have been formed in Christ. Could persons have the Spirit and not have Christ in them? They could; the Corinthians had not Christ in them.” (A. p.18) .

“In Romans 8. . . Paul says, 'If Christ be in you,' and I think if the Spirit of Christ is there you can say Christ is there, but then it is of great importance for Christ to be formed.” (A. p. 107).

Here the “formation” of Christ is treated as a work of the Spirit of an advanced character. You may have the Spirit, and even Christ may be in you, since you have the Spirit of Christ, without Christ being “formed” in you. As a sample case the Corinthians are cited. They had not even Christ in them according to this teaching, let alone Christ being formed in them.

In all this we have travelled grievously away from Scripture, although on page 107 a little lower down we read:-

“The only way to arrive at the truth is from the way in which Scripture presents it.”

How does Scripture present it? We turn in the first instance to the case of the Corinthians selected by our author to illustrate his point. We read, “Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor. 13: 5). So Christ was in the Corinthians after all, as He is in every **true** child of God. The only exception according to the verse is the reprobate, the unconverted.

We turn to John's first epistle. There the saints are truly “viewed as formed in the divine nature” but it is as “born of God,” so that “the babe” possesses the nature as much as “the Father” in the family of God (1 John 2: 12-29). Here again this teaching ignores the great foundation work of the Spirit in

order to attribute all its effects to the subsequent operations of the Spirit in our hearts.

But what about Christ being formed in us? This expression occurs but once in Scripture as follows:- “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4: 19). The Apostle's language here makes it certain that to his mind, — and therefore in the mind of the Spirit — “Christ formed in you” is an elementary thing. He stood in doubt as to these Galatian saints, as he tells them in verse 20, and hence he was passing again through birth pangs of soul-exercise over them — “until Christ be formed in you.” That accomplished, his birth pangs would end in deliverance. The Scriptural presentation of this truth is such as to place it amongst the elementary things that lie at the start. If Christ be not formed in those who take the place of Christians, an Apostle doubts if they are Christians at all! The way this phrase, as to Christ being formed in us, is wrested from its scriptural setting in these extracts is very mischievous.

Taking the plainest statements of objective truth and extracting from them false subjective meaning is sadly noticeable in these publications. Here are a few statements on the Epistle to the Colossians:-

“The Colossians were reconciled in their state. He would not have said it [**you . . . now hath He reconciled**'] of the Colossians if it had not been true . . . He could not have said that of the Corinthians for example.” (C. p. 106).

“If ye then be risen' -Yes, risen 'with' not 'in' . . . If it were 'risen in Christ' it would be objective.” (C. p. 37),

“It does not read 'If ye have died **in** Christ' . . . 'If ye have been raised **in** the Christ.' That is the whole point of the epistle, viz.. that they had arrived **subjectively** at the teaching of the death of Christ. 'If ye have died **with** Christ.' ” (C. p. 120).

“Although Christ is prominent in Colossians, the work of the Spirit is the main point.” (C. p.130).

When the Apostle wrote, “You hath He reconciled” to the Colossians he was stating what is true of Christians as such, and not something only true because they were conscious of it, having arrived at it in their state. What proves this is that the succeeding verses show reconciliation to be in view of presentation — “If ye continue in the faith . . .” Why that “if”? Simply because the Apostle viewed them as partaking of common Christian blessings — such as reconciliation — but still he had an element of doubt as to some of them. Had the Apostle meant “And you Colossians, having been brought by the Spirit subjectively into the truth of reconciliation, are reconciled,” he could never have added that “if.” Further, if souls are not “subjectively” in reconciliation they are not in the simple truth of the gospel. So “joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5: 11) is just proper Christian state, lying at the beginning of things.

As to the distinction attempted between “with” and “in,” a glance at the passages involved shows that it does not stand. For instance, Romans 6: 6 & 8, clearly refers to what was accomplished **objectively** at the cross. According to this theory it should read, “Our old man is crucified 'in' Him” — “If we be dead 'in' Him.” Yet in both cases “with” is used. Indeed, we need not go outside Colossians to see the falsity of the distinction. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above” (Col. 3: 1), i.e., since you are risen with Christ let there be the subjective power of resurrection in practice. “Risen **with** Him” (Col. 2: 12), is the reality on which is founded an appeal to answer to it.

The statement as to the Spirit being the **main point** in Colossians is a characteristic example of the way the letter of Scripture is violated, under plea of extracting its spirit. The Spirit of God indites an epistle in which He extols the glory and sufficiency of Christ, the Head of the body, and mentions

Himself but once, and that incidentally. (Col. 1: 8). We, however, are told that we are to understand that His main point is not what He speaks of, but what he barely mentions. We refuse to believe that the Spirit of God is marked by a singular inability to say what He means. Does this speaker desire to convey that the Spirit wishes to hide His meaning, whilst he feels himself possessed of that mystic inner light which gives sight and penetration into its recesses?

We, too, desire to dig beneath the surface of Scripture and reach the spirit of it. But then the spirit of the Holy Writings is not some sublimated essence altogether distinct from the actual words, but rather its spiritual drift and purpose as gathered from the actual words. We can only find the spirit **of what is there in the letter**, and not the spirit **of what is NOT there**.

This treatment of Scripture which we repudiate is all too reminiscent of the light and airy way in which the “higher critics” profess to discover two or more “Isaiahs” in Isaiah. They have no real proof. They just assume they have the critical insight enabling them to discover it, and then trumpeting abroad their imagined discovery.

### 3.

## **Belittling of Scripture in Favour of the Conceptions and Impressions of “Spiritual Men”**

Here lies, as we judge, the gravest part of the teaching under review. This feature was visible in the extracts we have quoted. It comes out more plainly in these we now proceed to give:-

“I would not be lawless as to the statements of Scripture but I am not exactly governed by statements of Scripture. For instance, I do not come to the Supper just because it is Scriptural . . . . What I said was, that I would not be lawless as to the statements of Scripture, but the unfolding of Scripture is in the hands of spiritual men . . . . The point I am pressing is this, that the Scripture can only be opened out by the Spirit of God, and the spiritual man.” (C. pp. 10, 11, 12).

“The mind of God is coming to us through spiritual men, not exactly through Scripture. Everybody has the Scriptures, but the mind of God is coming through spiritual men — men sowing to the Spirit.” (C. p. 31).

We have before now cast about in our mind for a sentence which would aptly sum up in a few words the attitude of this modern mysticism to the Word of God. Here we have found it in their own words. The Word of God is not denied. Its inspiration is upheld. Something from within its pages forms the text of every address, or is the starting point of every reading, but here you have in a nutshell the attitude which marks the exponents of this teaching, though not all make so plain a statement as this:-

“I am not exactly governed by statements of Scripture.”

The speaker, indeed the speakers, in the book we are now quoting from, are marked by rather more definiteness and vigour of expression. What is vaguely hinted at elsewhere is here presented boldly. Not only is the attitude clearly defined, but the reason for it is stated. The “spiritual man” is, we learn, the great thing for the unfolding of Scripture. Everybody has the Scriptures, but what we need is the mind of God, and that comes to us, it is stated, “not exactly through Scripture,” but “through spiritual men.” Consequently, a little further on we read:-

“I have sometimes said it is better to have one testimony in actual **life**, than a whole city full of Bibles.” (C. pp. 41, 42).

There are, of course, elements of truth in all this. It is the “spiritual” man, in contrast with the “natural” man, who receives the things of God; and the carnal believer is, in God's things, but a babe (1 Cor. 2 & 3). It is quite true, therefore, that only one who is spiritual is likely to minister the Word and open up God's mind with power. Yet plainly enough, the speaker here is carrying out his own theory and we are getting from his lips, not Scripture, but a peculiar and warped presentation of it. Not being just exactly governed by statements of Scripture he feels free to give us his own subjective impressions of Scripture, and we are left to accept them as coming from one who is presumably a “spiritual man.”

But what does Scripture itself say? It reveals to us our Lord Jesus Christ as absolutely governed by statements of Scripture (e.g., see Luke 4: 1-13; John 19: 28), and Paul likewise, (Acts 23: 5). It shows us a Scripture statement being accepted as final in the great apostolic council at Jerusalem (Acts 15: 15-19), and thus governing, not merely a believer (even allowing that he is a “spiritual man”!), but the whole Church of God.

But does Scripture say that the unfolding of Scripture is in the hands of spiritual men? No. It speaks of gifts given from the ascended Christ “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4: 11, 12). It indicates also that elders, who were, perhaps, not exactly “teachers,” might “labour in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5: 17). There is one Scripture which speaks of teaching amongst the saints in a more general way, viz., Colossians 3: 16. But there it is “teaching and admonishing one another.” It is evidently teaching of a homely and everyday sort in which all may take some part. If we could speak of the unfolding of Scripture being in anyone's hands it would be in those of teachers and elders raised up of the Lord. We do not care, however, for the phrase at all. It is too suggestive of the mental attitude towards Scripture which we condemn. It infers that Scripture is in our hands, and we manipulate it; whereas really it towers above the greatest of teachers, and is supreme.

The theory that we are examining, however, is that the spiritual man is one who “arrives at” the truth by the action of the Spirit **within** him. There is the “formative work” of which they speak, by which he reaches “certain ground” in his soul. When coming to Scripture, he thinks he finds there what he has reached by “spiritual formation” and then he proceeds to put his conceptions and impressions into words. The following extracts give the theory:-

“It is a good thing to have the form of doctrine, to have the manner by which you arrive at things. I think that in the history of our souls, we are sometimes on certain ground, and yet we do not know the way we arrived there. Now doctrine gives you that . . . He [**the Apostle Paul**] describes the state and how they got there . . . You get there, and the teaching of the Epistle to the Colossians establishes you . . . They needed a spiritual man to lead the way, to define the situation they had got to.” (C. pp. 121 , 122).

“John expects there is life in you, and that you will understand what this thing means. John does not write to the uninitiated-none of the Scriptures are written to such, John far less so” (C. p. 99).

According to this, Scripture plays but a very secondary part. It is quite subservient to this inward spiritual formation, this “inner light” as we may call it, Scripture being mainly of use as furnishing a suitable expression for it. The remarks on the Epistle to the Colossians are supplemented by a reference to John's gospel, which is quite remarkable in view of John's own statement: “These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name.” (20: 31).

Our author tells us that John takes for granted that there is life in you. John himself informs us that he writes in order that his readers “might have life,” through believing. Our author says that none of the Scriptures are written to the uninitiated; John far less so than others. John himself states that he writes that his readers **may** believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, not **because** they so believed. The fact really is, that, though the great mass of the New Testament Scripture was truly written to and for believers, John's gospel is the one book that avows as its object a purpose of world-wide dimensions.

To ordinary readers, uninitiated into such teachings, these quoted statements sound startling. Such would probably enquire, Does our author wish us to understand that he knows the object of John's writing better than John himself? or whether, on the other hand, he is so liberated from bondage to the letter of Scripture, that he can ignore its statements in favour of his own impressions and theories?

The latter is nearer the mark. He feels free to give that verse a rendering to harmonize with what he considers its “spirit”. That free rendering in the words of another of these instructors, is as follows:-

“The immediate occasion of this gospel [John's] was that the saints might be believers in the Son . . .” (B. p. 62).

There was nothing incongruous in this speaker's mind in the saints not being believers in the Son — believing in the Son being at that time considered by these mystics a spiritual attainment, which only some saints reach; nor anything incongruous in saints not as yet having life through His name; nor in this terribly incomplete belief and state of death marking saints generally wherever saints were found — for John's gospel is clearly not of local application like some of the epistles, but universal.

But John did not write that his readers might believe that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” as though they were yet defective in their faith as to His essential glory, as though while recognizing in Jesus the Messiah they had not risen to the faith of His Deity. Surely not, but that they might believe that, “Jesus IS the Christ, the Son of God.” (John 20: 31). So that if John really were addressing only “saints,” these “saints” did not even believe that Jesus was the Christ!! A truly preposterous proposition. Too preposterous, apparently, even for the author of this remark, for he discreetly omits the words from his quotation of the passage.

This is a sad example of how these modern mystics treat the Word of God. Nor is this an isolated example, an exception to the rule. The same attitude of mind persists, as seen in an example taken from a publication dated a quarter of a century later.

“I venture to bring forward the word of God. I am not now speaking of the Scriptures; of course, they are included. What Paul is speaking about is the word of God; its living character as spoken. The Scriptures, of course, are of supreme value, only the word of God here is the mystery, which men ordinarily know nothing of, whereas lovers of God and lovers of Christ make much of the mystery.” (F. p. 139).

“So I would urge the matter of the word of God, the completeness of it; not merely the Scriptures, but the full scheme that is in the mind of God, to include the whole scope of the assembly and its working out in the service of God in these last days . . . There is nothing missing now as to the scheme in the divine mind: made known in writing, but made known in ministry. Ministry is effected by the Spirit of God in the power of gift, and that is where the thing comes in for us; God is opening it up to us through the number of brethren that are capable of ministering. . . . So the word of God is known in its effectiveness. These meetings are a prime matter with God and the Holy Spirit is down here. . . .” (F. p. 143)

The Scriptures are acknowledged as the Word of God in these extracts. But according to their thoughts, a good deal more is included. The ministry of capable brethren is included, and the meetings where these capable brethren speak are considered to be a prime matter with God and the Holy Spirit down here. In these extracts there is a measure of what is true. The supreme value of Scripture is acknowledged, yet there is great danger in the way the Scriptures and the sayings of teachers are bracketed together.

We assert, on the contrary, that the God-breathed writings tower far above all uninspired utterances, however spiritual the brother who makes them may be.

The whole attitude of these teachers to the Scriptures was well summed up as follows:-

“Does the strict interpretation of the passage [Col. 1: 12] refer to the saints on earth, or in heaven? . . . I am not prepared for too strict an interpretation.” (C. p. 69).

That is just it. In that case their thinking would have to be subject to God's Word. As it is, their minds are left free to move at the dictation of the inner light, and Scripture can be used (sometimes quoted, and even misquoted), to adorn their thinkings and wrap them round with an authority they would not otherwise possess.

#### 4.

### **The Consequent Glorifying of a Priestly Caste, who come between an ordinary saint and the Lord.**

Any thoughtful Christian, who has followed thus far, will by now conclude that the drift of this teaching, and this treatment of Scripture, must be in the direction of greatly magnifying the importance and authority of the exponents of the teaching themselves. The “inner light” becomes the great authority, which involves, of course, that the real authority is vested in those in whom the “inner light” is most largely developed.

We now proceed to show that not only is this the case — and it runs in a kind of sub-conscious strain, yet most clearly, through all the utterances of this school, — but that it leads to a special priesthood being assumed for the “spiritual man” of whom so much is said. We read:-

“Where there are spiritual men in a meeting, there will be sure to be some priest break the bread who will put the saints in touch with Christ? . . . That is what the Supper is for in the mind of the Lord . . .” (C. p. 16).

“When what was intended in the Supper has not been availed of, the priest can bring in recovery and the Father be reached just the same.” (C. p. 17)

“Undoubtedly there is touch with Christ that the priest gets that every Christian does not. The priest has His mind because the priest has His life.” (C, p. 20).

“You would discourage certain brothers taking part in the morning meeting, then? . . . Not a simple soul, but one that habitually goes on with a thing. They are not subject nor watching the priests . . . They are just believers.” (C. p. 51).

“A great deal depends on the man that gives it [a **hymn**] out, whether it is a simple brother or a priest.” (C. p.55).

“All the saints will get great refreshment if you allow the priests to take the lead.” (C. p. 59).

The above extracts speak for themselves. The contrast drawn between the “simple brother,” or those that are “just believers,” or “the saints,” and a “priest” is unmistakable. It is again a carrying out of what we have previously noticed, viz., the subjective consciousness so magnified that it quite eclipses the reality itself.

Yet amidst many such remarks as the foregoing, one or two words are found which give a ray of hope that the reality of what God has effected is not totally lost. We read for instance:-

“In the run of meetings, how many priests are there (that is in priestly condition)?” (C. p. 16).

We welcome that little bracketed addition though it is ambiguous; it may simply mean that the speaker's definition of “a priest” is “one in priestly condition,” a meaning abundantly clear in all these extracts. On the other hand it may indicate that he qualifies his usage of the word “priest” by restricting its meaning in that way, and so that he may recognize the possibility of using the term in a larger sense. Our hope that this second sense may be his meaning is slightly increased by the following:-

“Would it be possible to be a son and not a priest? . . . Yes, and No. Every man who has the Spirit has title to sonship, and in the thought of God he is a son — 'Because ye are sons' . . . but to be consciously in sonship is a different thing.” (C. p. 85).

So it may be that he also admits that in the thought of God every man who has the Spirit is a **priest**. Albeit, any satisfaction we attempt to derive from this thought is largely discounted by our remembrance of the first extract we gave, wherein an authoritative exponent of this school assured us that we may have the Spirit and be in certain things “from the divine side,” but that if we do not subjectively meet our obligations these things become “null and void.” So that if these admissions were far clearer than they are, and greatly multiplied in number, they would not really amount to much.

Further, it is quite clear that these “spiritual men,” these “priests” hold in the minds of the speakers a kind of mediatorial position; they act as mediums between the simple or ordinary believer and Christ.

“What would mark a priest? . . . A priest puts you into touch with Christ?” (C. p. 4).

“Young souls who want to walk with me . . . They might not be able to explain things, possibly, but they get their eye on that man [**i.e., a priest**].” (C. p. 20).

“I think if there is a divinely given form you had better follow it. But as there is none, the next best thing we have is spiritual men. You may think I am giving spiritual men too much place, but I am not . . . The best thing for me then is when a brother, a priest, who knows what he is doing, gets up to pray or give thanks, to follow him closely. I want to know how he addresses Divine Persons, because he is in the life of Divine Persons, and has the intelligence of what suits these Persons.” (C. p. 31).

“Why does not that soul grow? . . . They are not paying attention to and learning from the priests.” (C. p. 50).

“What you said about the brother giving thanks for the loaf is encouraging. It is an honour to open the door for the Lord to come in. . . . To join the saints, yes. . . . But if the Lord is brought in the Supper, you have what follows on that. Before He knows about it, the affection He finds there carries His spirit right away, and He joins Himself to them. . . . We do not want doctrine, but if I were to break the loaf, do you know what I would say before I arose? 'Lord help me to open the door for Thee!' . . . To open the door to let Him in as Head.” (C. pp. 89, 90, 91).

All these sad wanderings in fields of thought and speculation are totally foreign to Scripture. In

the speakers view, a “priest” is one who “puts you in touch with Christ,” and consequently you “get your eye on” him: failing a divinely given form as to approach to God in prayer or worship, you “follow him closely,” and observe “how he addresses Divine Persons.” You should be “paying attention to, and learning from the priests,” for when a priest ministers at the actual breaking of the loaf in the Lord’s Supper, he “opens the door for the Lord to come in.” It is held apparently that the Lord does not and cannot “come in” as Head except there be a “priest” to open the door for Him, and except He “come in” we do not partake of “the Supper,” though it is freely conceded that we may “break bread.”

The tendency to read into the Lord’s Supper ideas not found in Scripture still persists, for in much later publications we read such as the following:-

“There is great need for careful analysis of the Scriptures that treat of the Lord’s Supper. One observes that the idea of a memorial is hardly touched with many. We hear of the Lord being remembered in His death, whereas the memorial is of Christ in heaven, alive as He is now; it is to recall Him, to bring Him back to mind.” (F. p. 13).

“We find constant allusions in our statements to the Lord, such as “to remember Thee in Thy death,” whereas, it is to remember Him, not anything He has done; not that that would be belittled, but it is to remember Him . . . .

“Would it be right to say that the calling of Him to mind brings before us Christ in glory? . . . Quite so. It is the Lord in glory really; it is the Lord’s supper, really a heavenly matter.” (F. pp. 24/27).

The above may be a sample of what we may hear, if we listen to these “priests,” but we prefer to adhere to the words of Scripture. We have “the **knowledge** [not the **remembrance**] of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4: 6). The Lord Jesus instituted His Supper on the night in which He was betrayed. He was not then in glory and the remembrance of which He then spoke could have had no reference to that. The broken loaf and the poured out cup were clearly symbols of His **death**, and we are ever to remember Him where once He was. Nothing can be clearer than His statement that the cup was to signify, “My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matt. 26: 28).

This is a very glaring instance of how the words of Scripture are set aside in favour of the impressions of “spiritual men.”

In another recent publication we find the following:-

“‘We, being many, are one loaf, one body.’ The bread being alluded to in that way as referring to the saints would mean we have to appropriate the saints. I am using the word appropriate in the sense in which we would appropriate food. Hence the question is raised, Are brethren worth appropriating? persons nominally Christians, are they worth appropriating? are they clean? In the types we have food that can be eaten; animals that are clean and can be appropriated. Hence the word fellowship implies that we appropriate one another.” (G. p. 55).

Here 1 Corinthians 10: 17 is referred to by the speaker. If that verse be read with care, it will be found to state that we, who rightly partake of the cup and the loaf, are one bread -or, loaf — that is, one body; and the sign, indicating that fact, is that we all partake of the one loaf. The loaf is the symbol of the holy body of our Lord, yielded up sacrificially in death for us all, and of that alone. The oneness of the saints is set forth in that they ALL PARTAKE of the ONE loaf.

We judge that the adjective that fits the extract we have just quoted is — fantastic. Some may

regard it as the utterance of a “priest;” if so, it is an example of “priestly” extravagance.

But how immensely all this magnifies “the priest” in question! What a wonderful person he must be! The speakers are acutely conscious of it, for one of them remarks:-

“Somebody said to me ‘I do not see much glory.’ I see a lot of glory about a priest in the morning meeting, and that is what is coming out, — just that.” (C . p . 129) .

Painful as it is, we beg our readers to pause and realize the point to which we have travelled, that of seeing a lot of glory about a “priest” who has so effectually officiated, as they claim, at the Lord's Supper.

It is the same sad story! The supreme glory of the great Head, — a living, bright objective Reality, — eclipsed by “a lot of glory” about a man!

Yet all is perfectly consistent in their eyes. Thus the priesthood of the saints is beclouded, and a special and limited class of “priests,” by whom ordinary believers can get into touch with the Lord, is mentally created. What was veiled or merely hinted at, has now been stated plainly.

## 5.

### **As a Further Consequence a Vein of Self-occupation runs through all their Utterances.**

It may not take the glaring form so visible in what we have just considered. It may take the form of magnifying their own particular company, or the yet far more plausible form of magnifying the assembly as a subjective formation, in an idealistic way. For instance:-

“We ought not to be content that we are an intelligent company of Christians; there are a good many absent, and we ought to miss them.” (A. p. 108).

Here the speaker's own particular company is in question. But further:-

“As sons they [i.e., **those in the body**] are formed in the divine nature, and are intelligent; and they are associated with Christ as wisdom in working out of every problem in the universe, and they display Him, for they act exactly as He would. It is not only that they **do** right things, but they do them **as He would** and so they are His body.” (A. p. 109).

“It is Christ's assembly, and competent to express intelligently His mind for the universe . . . . A company capable of intelligently giving the mind of God on any question that may arise in the universe. It will be the highest court of appeal in the coming age.” (A. pp. 109, 110).

“The prayer in chap.1 [**Eph.**] is that we may know the will of God and see the greatness of His power, but that in chapter 3 is that we may be great ourselves.” (A. p. 110).

“I look upon the assembly as being composed of spiritually intelligent persons. What is the idea of an assembly if it is not for counsel? You see He is Head over all things to it, not to the body but to the assembly. But then the assembly is His body. It has intelligence.” (A. pp. 110, 111).

According to Scripture, the saints, who compose the assembly, will have positions of authority and administration in the age to come (1 Cor. 6: 2, 3). In them Christ is to be glorified and admired (2 Thess. 1: 10), and as the heavenly city of Revelation 21, the assembly will be the light-bearer in that day. Hence “the nations . . . shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.” Yet the light is not the light of the church, “for the glory of God did lighten it, and

**the Lamb is the light thereof.”**

Yet the speaker in these extracts does not hesitate to go much further, and tells us that of which Scripture knows nothing. The “sons” will unquestionably be publicly associated with Christ in that day, but these details as to that association extending to “the working out of every problem in the universe,” or that assembly “intelligently giving the mind of God on any question that may arise in the universe,” and being “the highest court of appeal in the coming age,” we must accept (if indeed we do so at all) upon the speaker's **ipse dixit** alone. Can the speaker have really given a minute's quiet consideration to his own words? How could the assembly be **capable** of giving **God's mind** on **any** question that may arise in the **universe**, except it has a mind as big as God's? How can it be the **highest** court of appeal in the coming age so long as God exists? — Or does He abdicate His judicial position in its favour? We have indeed “come unto . . . the church of the firstborn which are written in heaven” but not to the church of the firstborn, **as judge of all**, as these teachings infer. “But ye are come unto . . . GOD, **the Judge of all**” (Heb. 12: 22, 23). We prefer to leave the self-centred thoughts of mysticism for the solid rock of Holy Scripture.

Again we read:-

“It is not exactly that you are dependent on the Head, nor are you independent of Him, but you are dependent on that living organism of which He is the Head, and in that you get the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . And you feel it is a living organism, you feel the living truth coming out, you are in touch with the temple where the light is. The light is there, the body is there, and the truth is coming out from the Head through that living organism. The men through whom the light is coming are in direct connection with the Head . . . and you feel the gain of being put in touch with the spirits of **men** that have been moving in touch with the Head.” (C. p. 112).

Previously it had been remarked:-

“Mary [**John 20**] was qualified for the greatest company on earth. It goes without saying that the Christian company is the greatest company in heaven, but it is the greatest on earth.” (C. p. 69).

“You feel how perfectly you act as under the influence of Christ . . . There is moral dignity. There is nothing like it on earth.” (C. p. 92).

Comment is hardly needed. The self-occupied, self-conscious, and one must add, self-complacent strain, is not even hidden beneath the surface, but is plainly visible. The speakers feel these things; they feel how perfectly they act, and they are glad to tell us so.

6.

**Speaking according to the Light derived from the work within them, rather than from the Light of Scripture without, many Fanciful and Extravagant Ideas are produced, and some that are Fundamentally False.**

A number have come to light in the extracts already quoted. We append further and worse examples with our comments.

“The point in Romans 8 is not only having the Spirit. I think from this point of view the affections developed by the Spirit are covenant affections. We have to distinguish between covenant affections and family affections. I think covenant relationships involve that we are equal to the obligations of the

contract entered into.” (A. pp. 4 & 5).

This alludes to Romans 8: 4. The believer walking in the Spirit fulfils those things the law righteously required of man. This is spoken of as “a covenant,” and these righteous requirements are alluded to as “the obligations of the contract entered into.” This far-fetched idea is derived from an attempt to make the giving of the law in Exodus a type of the believer taking up certain obligations before God as a fruit of being redeemed; and of this “type” Romans 8: 4 is supposed to be the “anti-type.” This once accepted, you advance to the transference of the word “covenant” from the “type” to the “antitype;” you transmute the word “covenant” into a “contract,” and further you proceed to contemplate “covenant affections” and “family affections,” and to differentiate between them; and in result instead of a pyramid of truth broad-based on the Scriptures of Truth, you have a pyramid of fancy, precariously poised upon a very slender apex. But not only have you thus travelled into regions of fanciful and extravagant ideas, but of very serious and fundamental error. What is this contract as to which the New Testament is silent? A covenant involves two parties, as Galatians 3 tells us. A contract involves penalties for its breach. 2 Corinthians 3: 6-18 sweeps away all these unsteady theories. Obligations there are, resting upon the believer as the result of grace bestowed, yet even so they do not stand upon a legal or covenant basis. Christianity is not a system of obligation ending in death and condemnation, but the positive ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit.

Elsewhere this teacher says:-

“I believe in making resolutions. The Lord holds you to them . . . . He calls you to your vow. You make a vow, and that vow is valued according to Moses' valuation, according to the currency of the sanctuary. In the book of Leviticus, chapter 27, God puts a distinct value on your vow; . . . . He will discipline you if you depart from the resolution, . . . . The Lord loves you to go forward and make your resolution; you owe it to Him to do that. He did that on our behalf.” (B. pp. 64, 65).

We most heartily believe in purpose of heart in the things of God. We welcome all that stirs up our souls to the diligence of which Peter speaks in his second epistle (ch. 1: 5), but we are not going back to the Galatian error of “holiness by law,” even by so specious a route as that opened up to us here.

Another idea frequently appearing in these publications, is that truth could not be ministered by the apostles except that the state which the truth involves was already present in those to whom they ministered. For instance:-

“There was a company formed there [**Ephesus**] in which Christ was expressed. 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.' There were conditions at Ephesus which enabled the Apostle to do that: to open up the counsels of God. He could not do that at Corinth. There was not the state. Having that state is necessary for the revelation of the truth.” (B. p. 10).

We have long recognized that the servant of Christ cannot really minister truth from mere head knowledge. He must himself possess it in power. Here, however, we are told that he cannot minister truth, if his hearers do not already possess it in power.

Carry the idea a little further and you reach this travesty:-

“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' A Man speaks from heaven, owning the saints on earth as Himself; and He could do it truthfully, because Stephen was like the Lord in that sense; he acted entirely in the spirit of Christ, when he was put to death . . . . James himself testifies 'Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.' So that the Lord can truthfully own such people as Himself.” (B. pp. 25, 26).

If this be true, then it would be untruthful if the Lord owned as Himself those who fail to display the traits that characterize Himself; which is only another way of saying that our place in relation to the Lord **is** determined by what we are for Him; and this is of course the exact principle of **law**, and not grace at all.

Two alternatives face those who come under the influence of this teaching. Either they will be a prey to legality, earnestly endeavouring to reach the state necessary if the truth is to be ministered to them, — a state which is really only produced by the Spirit **through the very truth which is thus denied them**; or they will relieve their oppressed minds by dropping into the habit of assuming they are in the state because they are able to analyse matters, and speak about it with a certain easy familiarity, and thus they will reduce all these mystical teachings to the merest theories, quite unrelated to what is their own real state before God. Either alternative is bad. The second is the worse of the two.

These publications are full of extravagances of statement, which have no Scripture support, and are sometimes in opposition to it. For instance, alluding to John 20, we read:-

“Well, the testimony of resurrection has not gone out yet. . . . Do you mean it is not expounded? It may have gone out in gospel testimony but not to the world. . . . Publicly? . . . It is known and enjoyed in the Supper . . . It is only known to affection.” (C. p. 34).

What can one say to statements such as these ? Simply this: They are NOT TRUE. The resurrection of Christ was the great theme of Apostolic testimony to the world as recorded in Acts.

“Quickening is the climax of the work of God.” (C. p.39)

Is it? Read Ephesians 2: 4-7 and see. According to these verses God's work lifts us from death in sins to a seat in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, and quickening, far from being a climax, is but the first step upwards. Again:-

“Is your thought that we do not need to wait for the rapture? . . . My thought was this, that what will be enjoyed on the morning of the rapture is ours to enjoy in the night of the Lord's rejection.. I once heard a brother say we could have the rapture every Lord's Day morning. . . . Is there not just this difference between the morning meeting and the rapture? The rapture is like a military call, whereas Eutychus, who was recovered by an embrace, suggests the state for the Supper?” (C. pp. 43-46).

Some of our readers who have not followed this kind of teaching may be puzzled as to what all this really means. We cite it as an example of that kind of fantastic application of Scripture which may ultimately lead one almost anywhere. Again:-

“The Supper is the most real thing in the universe today.” (C. p. 57).

If this brother had contented himself with telling us that it was the **most** real thing in **the world**, we should have demurred and suggested that the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures were at least as real. When, however, he quits the world and soars forth into the spacious universe with his sweeping assertion, we simply do not believe him, and deplore the intemperate character of an utterance like this, though we recognize it is quite consistent with his theory. Conscious of the movings of the “inner light” and untrammelled by any exact interpretations of Scripture, not exactly governed indeed by ITS **statements**, such statements as these are easily accounted for.

We may remark here that as far as we noticed in this book from which we are now quoting, the Lord's Supper is uniformly printed with a capital 'S', and Scripture with a small 's'. Is this intentional? If so, it is significant.

We now cull an extract from a different direction; the chapter under discussion is 1 Corinthians 15:-

“The burial of Christ clears the ground entirely of the man who was offensive to God in view of a new beginning for God; He having in grace taken the place of man according to the flesh. It reminds you in that way of 2 Samuel 21, where all the bodies of the offenders had to be buried. . . . Christ has died vicariously, and was buried — has submerged the offending man — 'But now is Christ risen from the dead.' It suggests Genesis 6, 'The end of all flesh is come before Me.' All flesh was submerged. If He was buried, all flesh was removed from before the sight of God — nothing left of man according to the flesh. . . . There is no revival of that kind of man, so 'God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.' It is a question now of resurrection. . . . Resurrection involves that what comes up pleases God. The going down refers to what displeases, hence His burial is part of His vicarious work, and the coming up is on account of what He is.” (D. pp. 193, 194).

Truth of a very important character is here being dealt with so that the introduction of details based upon the writer's own thoughts, and not stated in Scripture, is the more to be regretted.

We have only to turn to the Scripture which forms the basis of these remarks to see that when the death of Christ is mentioned, its vicarious character is made evident. He died “for our sins” (v.3). He took them up in His death as our Vicar or Substitute, but no such thought is attached to His burial. It is simply “and that He was buried.” Nor is such a thought anywhere in Scripture connected with His burial. Nowhere is His burial presented as “part of His vicarious work.”

But we are said to be “buried with Him” in two passages (Rom. 6: 4 and Col. 2: 12). Yet notice carefully how it is put. “Buried with Him **by baptism** unto death.” “Buried with Him **in baptism.**” In neither case, nor anywhere else, does it say, “Buried with Him in His burial,” as it would if He were buried vicariously as is taught here. We do reckon ourselves dead unto sin insomuch as He **died** to sin. His death was our death for God and for faith; but then His death **was** vicarious. His burial was **not** vicarious.

We further remark that when Scripture speaks of His death, which was vicarious, and in which “sin in the flesh” has been “condemned” (Rom. 8: 3), there is a certain definiteness about its utterances very unlike the mystical vagueness of the passage under review.

For instance:-

It is “our **old man**” that is crucified with Him. (Rom. 6: 6).

In dying “He died unto sin once.” (Rom. 6: 10) .

It is “ye” [i.e., **believers**] who have become dead to the law by the body of Christ.” (Rom.7: 4)

“I am crucified with Christ.” (Gal. 2: 20).

“The world is crucified unto me and I unto the world,” (Gal. 6: 14),

“Ye [i.e., **believers**] are circumcised . . . in the circumcision of Christ.” (Col. 2: 11).

Note that these statements are restricted to believers. It does not say, “the old man,” but “our old man,” has been crucified. If it had said, “the old man,” then it might be maintained that everybody is “dead to the law,” “crucified with Christ,” and “crucified to the world.” It would be introducing into this matter the confusion of thought so frequently found in other circles between propitiation and substitution when sins are in question. It does say that “sin in the flesh” has been “condemned,” which involves, of course, the condemnation of man in the flesh himself, — the condemnation of the Adamic

race. There, however, Scripture stops. To say that man in the flesh is condemned in the cross of Christ is to state important truth. To say as we read here, that Christ has “taken the place of man according to the flesh,” is to say what Scripture does not say, and to open the door to false inferences. We believers rejoice that Christ has taken our place, for as a consequence we escape the judgment that belongs to our place as sinners and get His place. The logical consequence of Christ taking the place of man after the flesh would be, that man after the flesh escapes the judgment that belongs to his place, which is exactly what he does not do. The truth is that he is condemned, inasmuch as sin is condemned, in the Cross.

One more thing we have to remark on this extract. It completely ignores the **facts** on which the doctrine is based, a characteristic error of mysticism. The doctrines of the gospel are not mere theorizings, not the building of ideas which have no foundation in fact. All those great Scriptural doctrines, we have just quoted, are securely based upon the great FACT of Christ's death. The doctrine springs out of the fact, and must be tested by it. If a doctrine is advanced which purports to be based upon Christ's death, but involving a falsification of His death, or denying any of its details, then the doctrine stands condemned **ipso facto** as false.

Now here is advanced the doctrine that the burial of Christ was the putting out of sight from before God of what was offensive to Him. The speaker makes it clear that in his mind Christ only thus became — or perhaps we should say, His sacred body that was buried became — offensive to God in a vicarious sense. This is a statement serious enough, and fundamentally false.

On the cross Christ **was** “made sin for us, who knew no sin.” (2 Cor. 5: 21). Here the doctrine fits the fact, for He **was**, though Himself perfect, treated as sin when He vicariously stood in our place, and hence He was forsaken of God. In His burial He was **not** buried vicariously for us as an offensive thing even though perfectly holy Himself. This doctrine does not appear in Scripture for the very simple reason that it has no basis in FACT. The fact of His burial was that His sacred body never saw corruption. This important **fact** is foretold in Psalm 16, and quoted and enforced in Acts 2: 25-31 & 13: 35-37. Hence in keeping with this, though men appointed His grave with the wicked and would have laid His body with those of the two malefactors, God ordered otherwise, and “He was with the rich in His death” (Isa. 53: 9). Every circumstance connected with His burial suggests that which is the very opposite of corruption.

Had corruption touched His body then there would have been a **fact** upon which to rest the doctrine that in His burial what was **offensive** was submerged, or that the “going down refers to what **displeases**.” The speaker makes his meaning clear by referring to the burial by David of the putrid remains of Saul's sons as recorded in 2 Samuel 21. He treats this as an illustration of his subject, which “reminds” him of it. Well, it may remind him “in that way” of the fanciful doctrine he is enunciating, but it is as far removed from any resemblance to the **facts** of Christ's burial as can possibly be.

The whole quotation is a sad illustration of how mysticism can imperil the most important truth by dealing in imaginative details which only mix error with it. There is then a double danger. First that the error will be imbibed by those who unthinkingly accept all that the teacher in question says, and hence, even if still holding in the main to what is true, they have to rest it upon an altogether insecure and imaginary foundation. Secondly, it may lead others, who do enquire and test what they read and hear, to reject not only these untenable ideas, but also important truth which they are used to support.

The fact that man in the flesh is judicially condemned in the cross of Christ; that consequently he now has no status before God; and that the last Adam, the second Man, does abide before God in His risen glory, and that we believers stand in the risen Christ: — all this is truth of the last importance. How necessary then to let it stand on its own proper Scriptural foundation, and not imperil it by these

mystical imaginings.

We now give a number of extracts which show that this modern mysticism deals in unscriptural fashion not only with the work, but also with the Person of Christ.

“Our Lord Jesus, though really Man, begotten of the Holy Ghost, born of the divinely-overshadowed vessel, was uncreate, though He entered His own creation, and His holy humanity had no link with that of fallen man. As to His spirit, it was Himself — the Son.” (E. p. 172)

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. The omission of “in spirit” in verse 40 is important as confirming that His spirit was Himself personally and could not be spoken of as in our case.” (E. p. 199).

With these words our author launches us into deep waters. It was during the fourth century that one Apollinarius, in opposing the Arians, who emphasized Christ's Manhood and denied His Deity, formed the theory that in Christ the Word (Greek, **Logos**) took the place of the rational element in man; or in other words that our Lord assumed only a human body, and that the Divine nature in Him took the place of the rational human soul or mind. By this he hoped to meet the Arian heretics on their own ground, and give a rational explanation of the otherwise inexplicable mystery of His Person.

Here we have a twentieth-century attempt to solve this great and precious mystery, and in result it is hardly distinguishable from the speculations of Apollinarius of the fourth century.

Some of the readers of these words detected the speculative element, and raised questions as to it; whereupon further explanation is given, as follows:-

“Every soul that loves Him and bows to scripture would surely admit that while in becoming flesh He changed His estate He could not and did not change in any way His personality, and still more would reject any suggestion that henceforth there became embodied in Him two personalities. The thought is abhorrent! Nor would any reverent soul assert that He received, as we, a created spirit. Yet, HE HIMSELF, THE SON, became and abides for ever really, actually Man, in all that holy manhood involves. Having become Man how could His spirit be other than human though never ceasing to be divine? for He brought into manhood all that was perfect in manhood according to God. It was surely as was said, Himself, for passing into death in Luke, He commends His spirit to His Father. His death was a reality, as His burial attests.” (E. p. 279).

On the same page there is added a footnote, which says:-

“At the same time, to speak of Him having a human spirit savours of dividing up what scripture does not, and might seem to imply something added to Him.”

At first sight these explanations appear to approximate more closely to Scripture than the writer's original words. We are thankful to read that “the Son became and abides for ever really, actually Man, in all that holy manhood involves,” since 1 Thessalonians 5: 23 makes it quite certain that holy manhood involves the “whole spirit and soul and body.” The sentence that follows, though couched in the form of a question, also has a pleasing sound about it, if read in a casual way. If, however, we read it with greater care we soon become conscious that it is strangely ambiguous.

The whole point turns, we must remember, upon a differentiation between what is Divine and what is human, and no question as to any other kind of spirit has been imported into the discussion. The writer asks us how could Christ's spirit “be other than human though never ceasing to be divine” — i.e., how could it be other than human though never ceasing to be what is not human! What strikes us as being really serious is the evident effort by these ambiguous words to pacify minds that are alarmed, or

at least enquiring, by assuring them that in some obscure or mystical sense, humanity can be connected with the spirit of our blessed Lord, while at the same time stoutly maintaining his theory as to the point in question, viz., that Christ's spirit was "Himself — the Son" — as shown by the still later sentence, and also the footnote, as quoted.

What then is the point at issue in these articles? Just this, did our Lord in becoming Man assume a full and proper humanity, or only in a modified and imperfect form? Proper humanity involves spirit and soul and body as we have seen, and of these the spirit comes first both in importance and in Scriptural order. If He did not assume spirit as well as soul and body He clearly was not man in a full and perfect sense.

Our author **reasons** somewhat as to this matter. He attempts to render his own theory attractive by setting up, as a repulsive background, other theories which may be even worse. We too do not believe that our Lord "changed" His essential personality, nor that in any sense His incarnation involved the embodiment of two personalities in Him: still our rejection of those ideas does not in any way dispose us to accept his alternative. Nor do we feel inclined to follow his example and mainly support our assertions by reasonings.

The whole matter is emphatically one which demands not reasoning but absolute subjection to what is revealed in Scripture, and the humble confession of ignorance where Scripture is silent.

Does Scripture afford us any light as to the way in which our blessed Lord was pleased to assume humanity? It certainly does. Our author has quoted one passage, and drawn a deduction in favour of his own thoughts from the fact that the words, "in spirit," in Luke 2: 40, are open to question as some old manuscripts omit them. As to this, we have only to remark that verse 52 of the same chapter affirms that "Jesus increased in wisdom," and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to understand these words if He did not assume a human spirit in becoming man, since wisdom is an attribute of spirit rather than of soul or body. He was indeed Wisdom incarnate! and if, as our author affirms, "His spirit was Himself," in what sense could He **grow** in wisdom?

His deduction, however, such as it is, is based upon what possibly should not be in Scripture. Shall we turn for a moment to what is in Scripture? Our Lord Jesus uses these words, "My spirit" (Luke 23: 46). "My soul" (Matt. 26: 38). "My body" (Matt. 26: 12), so that there can be no question that He possessed all three. When however it is said that though we may understand the third and even the second in an ordinary sense, we must import an altogether different meaning into the first, we must search a little further into the Word of God.

We will cite but three passages. The first occurs in Hebrews 2, in a passage dealing directly and explicitly with the incarnation of the Lord. The "children" given to Him of God being "partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (Ver. 14). Two words are used here, the first being of stronger force than the second. We partake of flesh and blood, i.e., we have it in common, for it is our original condition. He "took part" of the same, for originally He was otherwise and He assumed it, with a view, as the context shows, to the accomplishment of death and the taking up of the High Priestly place. Now it is just here that the Spirit of God has granted us a little light as to what this taking part of flesh and blood involved, and we have inspired words which would seem to have been written in view of such speculations as those we are considering:- "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Ver. 17).

The words we emphasize are these:- "IN ALL THINGS." With this before us how can we accept our author's statements? They may be plausible, and they may offer an explanation of what is really beyond all explanation, but judged by this Scripture, — THEY ARE NOT TRUE. If He was made like

to His brethren **in all things**, — sin apart, as chapter 4 shows — then clearly He was so not only in body or in soul but in spirit too.

Hebrews 4: 15, corroborates and strengthens the testimony of the above Scripture. In connection with His qualifications, on the human side, for the High Priestly office, we read that He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” Here there is one great exception to the general statement. He was altogether **apart from sin**. This one exception made, however, the statement is all-comprehensive. He was tempted IN ALL POINTS. Historically the Gospels confirm this. Take for example Luke's account of the temptation in the wilderness. There the temptations are presented in ascending order: the first being addressed especially to the body, the second to the soul, and the third to the spirit. Indeed we are safe in saying that by far the fiercest temptations are those which assail the spirit in man. Our blessed Lord met them all, and triumphed in them all, **in perfect manhood**. This blessed truth also is robbed of its glory by these sad speculations.

We have one more passage to quote, 1 Corinthians 6: 17. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.” The previous verse shows that it is not exactly the Holy Spirit that is alluded to here, for the term “one spirit” is in contrast to “one body,” though it is of course **by** the Holy Spirit that we are one spirit with the Lord. Adopt the idea advocated in these extracts and how near one comes to deifying the saints!

We may be asked of course how we explain the great wonder of the incarnation, if we do not accept these explanations, which have been offered? Our answer is very brief and simple. We do not explain it at all. We thankfully accept what is revealed, and desire prayerfully to weigh these revelations that we may arrive at their meaning and discern what is involved in them, but we dare not go beyond Scripture and trespass on forbidden ground. Nor would the writer, we have been examining, have thus trespassed, we fully believe, had he not been of this mystical school. Being of it, however, he apparently feels himself inwardly competent to travel into regions of which Scripture is silent.

The extracts we have considered were taken from publications of over 30 years ago. We now pass to teachings that were issued more recently, and which display even worse features. Our quotations must be of some length in order that the main features of the teaching may be displayed.

“Luke clearly bases our Lord's sonship on the great divine transaction of the incarnation. The angel says to Mary, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and power of the Highest overshadow thee, wherefore the holy thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God.' The 'wherefore' links sonship with the transaction of the Holy Spirit mentioned. Were He Son already, this could be stated, and the passage would read, 'is Son of God,' the 'wherefore' being unnecessary. These remarks apply in measure also to John 1: 14, If the evangelist by the Spirit wished to teach eternal sonship he could have said, 'He who was Son became flesh, and so we contemplated Him in this relation with His Father.' But Scripture contains no such statement.” (H. p. 16).

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“The first **direct** presentation of sonship in John 1 is in verse 18. . . . Verse 18 tells of the **position** of the Only-begotten Son as declaring God. It is a position **reached** as indicated by the preposition 'in' (the Greek, as is well-known, meaning 'direction towards, motion to, on, or into,' etc., etc. — Liddell and Scott) . . . . Some would remove this important evidence against so-called eternal sonship by saying that this preposition has not its ordinary meaning here. But why not? If we bear in mind that in becoming flesh, Christ came under God's eye, not only as His equal in Deity, but as Man, expressing all loveliness, moral and personal, answering to eternal desire and purpose, it is quite intelligible that the Spirit would convey this in indicating, by the preposition He employs, that the Lord

had come into the bosom of the Father.” (H. p. 17),

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“In the light of these considerations, with many others that could be mentioned, there cannot be a doubt in a subject mind that the sonship of our Lord is contingent on His incarnation.” (H.p.18).

\* \* \* \* \*

“There is nothing in the Scripture here [**John** 5] to show the preincarnate sonship of Christ. The chapter teaches the personal equality of the Son with the Father, but also that, in sonship, He has **taken a place** of inferiority in subjection to the Father.” (I. p. 3).

\* \* \* \* \*

“Scripture teaches, as has been variously pointed out in recent years, that while His Person remains unchanged, the sonship of our Lord denotes **subjection**, and thus does not rightly apply to Him viewed in preincarnate Deity, when He was eternally in the form of God, which **cannot** imply subjection.” (I. p. 8).

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“It may seem pious to attach names to Him as in absolute Deity, but we cannot go beyond what is revealed. No true lover of Christ will go beyond that. It may be done in ignorance, it has been done in ignorance for centuries, but if the Spirit of God challenges us as to it, and we disregard the challenge, it is very serious . . . . So if there is a showing, a calling attention to a thing by the Spirit, we can no longer plead ignorance.” (J. pp. 5, 6, 7)

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“The designation 'The Word,' as characterizing One who expressed the mind of God, obviously applies primarily to Christ as Man, and hence precludes its application to Him as a title in pre-incarnate Deity in the past.” (J. p.7)

The author of these extracts has revived a false and heretical idea, which in the past has afflicted the church. He clearly asserts the Deity of Christ; indeed he advances this theory as to His non-eternal Sonship because he supposes that to assert His eternal Sonship would logically lead to a weakening of His Deity. On the contrary we affirm that the denial of His eternal Sonship will weaken the hold of believers upon His full and proper Deity, and be likely eventually to lead to its abandonment. The present generation, who imbibe this teaching, may hold to it; but what about another generation, who may be found here — if our Lord comes not — half a century later?

Our affirmation may seem severe. But we make it for this reason: God has revealed Himself in a variety of ways through the ages, but only in these last days, when He has spoken to us “in Son,” has He been revealed in Trinity. The Old Testament gives indications of three Persons in the Godhead, by using the word for God, **Elohim**, which is in the plural. Indications, yes; but no revelation. In the New Testament the Trinity stands fully revealed, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and **ONLY** thus.

Frequently we hear and read about the First, Second and Third Persons of the Trinity, but they have never revealed Themselves to us thus, and the use of such terms is decidedly open to question.

So the bare fact is this: if the One commonly spoken of as the First Person only **became** the “Father,” and the Second Person only **became** the “Son,” by reason of the incarnation and the virgin birth, we have no real revelation at all. In that case, in Father, Son and Spirit, we should only have the knowledge of various parts assumed by the Divine Persons; of what They were pleased to become, not

what They really **are**. If we have no Eternal Father and no Eternal Son, and no Eternal Spirit, then the revelation of the Trinity is largely shorn of its glory. What we had believed to be a glorious and all-illuminating Sun, becomes pale and nebulous, and likely to be ignored in fifty years time.

To put the matter in another way — if you tamper with the **ONLY** revelation we have of God in Trinity, you can only maintain the thought of the Trinity by substituting some other description, which is the fruit of human thinking and not of Divine revelation, or by claiming, as our author seems to do, that God, as He really is, is not only inscrutable but unrevealable; which means, we do not **really** know God at all.

These are preliminary remarks. Let us now scrutinize the above extracts, and we shall see that the denial of our Lord's eternal Sonship is based upon human reasoning to the effect that sonship must **of necessity** signify subjection and even inferiority. That reasoning being accepted as beyond question, every passage, that on the surface seems to state or imply eternity of Sonship, must be explained away.

It is worthy of note that the ancient Arian heresy, and its modern revival under "Pastor" Russell and Judge Rutherford and "Jehovah's Witnesses," had and has a similar basis of reasoning. They avoid the supposed difficulty by an even worse explanation: that the Son is not properly God, but the first of all God's creatures, and the Creator of all else beneath Him. Our simple statement is that neither this theory nor that of our author is needed, for the difficulty lies only in their false reasoning.

It has been remarked that truth as to unknown objects may reach us either by resemblance or by analogies. Now man was originally made in the likeness of God, but this likeness has been sadly marred by the fall, and the true knowledge of God lost. As a consequence men have groped after God and sought to attain some knowledge of Him by resemblances or likenesses, and that to their undoing. Hence we are warned against the attempt to liken God to anything in such Scriptures as Isaiah 40: 18, 25; 46: 5-7. On the other hand, the names "Father" and "Son," as applied to the Godhead, are used in an analogical way; that is, their meaning would have been lost upon us had we not known something of the analogy of fatherhood and sonship in relationships of this life.

But every analogy has limits which must not be exceeded. To reason back from the human to the Divine, so as to impose upon the Godhead limitations, which govern the human, is a gross fallacy; a piece of false reasoning which vitiates the teaching we have before us.

It is asserted that, "the sonship of our Lord denotes **subjection**" and again that, "in Sonship, He has taken a place of **inferiority** in subjection to the Father." It is true of course that, coming into the world, the Son took a subject place. But why attribute that subjection to His Sonship? Amongst men a son is subject until he becomes of age; but even so, it is quite incorrect to state that a father, as such, exists before his son. The relations are correlative and simultaneous, and the one cannot be either without or antecedent to the other, though the individual, who becomes a father, is antecedent to his son.

Among men not infrequently a son turns out to be superior in mind and action to his father. We are safe in saying that sonship does not imply inferiority of fact and nature, but on the contrary equality and identity of nature. Even if it did, we should have to point out that the reality in the Godhead is far greater than that which is used as an analogy, and not to be circumscribed by it. Thus "King" is used of God, not because He is just like a human sovereign, but because He has the original Pattern of infinite and eternal royalty. Thus the relation of "Father" and "Son" in the Godhead form the original Pattern of such fatherhood and sonship as exist among men.

We have endeavoured to point out the fallacies underlying this reasoning, but now let us

emphasize that which is far more weighty than any reasoning. We read in John 5: 18, that by the very fact that Jesus said that God was His Father, He was “making Himself equal with God.” Doubtless the Jews said this of Him, and wished to kill Him for it, but in this verse it is not stated as an utterance of the Jews, but as a statement of the Evangelist. It is not the Evangelist recording what they said, whether right or wrong, but stating an historic fact, and giving an inspired comment upon it. If a man was stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath, it was certainly breaking the Sabbath to command a man to pick up and carry his bed. This the Lord deliberately did. And the assertion that God was His Father was an assertion of equality and not of inferiority, as claimed in these extracts. One word of Scripture is more weighty than any amount of argument.

In the above extracts Luke 1: 35 is fastened upon as giving us the true and complete explanation of the Sonship of our Lord. But it is argued that the “wherefore” (in the A.V. it is “therefore”) links sonship with the action of the Holy Spirit there mentioned, and that had He been Son already the “wherefore” would have been omitted, and it would simply have stated that He is Son of God. But notice, first, that there was also the overshadowing of “the power of the Highest;” and second, that it is “that holy thing which shall be born” that is to be called Son of God. The august Name is attached to “that holy thing” born of the Virgin. Because of the marvellous miracle of the virgin birth the designation Son of God belongs to Him even in His physical manhood. This we all gladly confess. It is the effort to tie down the name, “Son of God,” to this; to evacuate it of all meaning save this, that we strenuously resist. This also applies to such a Scripture as Psalm 2: 7.

Then John 1: 14 & 18 are referred to, and as to the former verse it is contended that if the Spirit had wished to teach eternal Sonship it could have read, “He who was Son became flesh, etc.” It is then asserted that Scripture contains no such statement.

Is this true? Is there no such statement in Scripture as that “He who was Son became flesh”? We ask our readers to turn to Romans 1: 3. Read it in the A.V. or in Darby's New Translation — as quoted from in these extracts — for the sense in both is the same, to the effect that “according to the flesh” or, as we often say, by incarnation, God's Son was made [or **came** of] David's seed. Here is the exact truth, which, it is asserted, Scripture does not contain. Not in the exact words chosen by the speaker in the extracts, it is true; but in the very words chosen by the Holy Spirit, which are much better. That the Son of God by incarnation became Son of David is truth Divinely stated. That a Person in the Godhead, who cannot be named or described, became by incarnation the Son of God, is simply human imagination and, what is worse, very serious error of a most fundamental nature.

Notice further that it is denied that “The Word” applies to Christ “as a title in pre-incarnate Deity in the past.” So we must not speak of Him as the Eternal Word; and that in spite of what is written in John 1: 1, 2 & 14. To our minds it seems perfectly plain that the Word, who was God, and was with God in the beginning, became flesh and dwelt among us. There is what He was, and what He became; and “The Word” is what He ever was, and “flesh” what He became. The statements are quite definite. Can they be avoided?

Yes, this denier of our Lord's eternal Sonship endeavours to avoid them. It is said that “The Word” is just a title by which the Lord Jesus became known among the early believers. He argues that it was given to Him, or assumed by Him, in becoming flesh, just as the title “king” is assumed when a man takes an earthly throne. It is argued that if we say, for instance, “When the king was a child . . . ,” we do not necessarily mean that he was king when he was a child. So when Scripture says “In the beginning was the Word . . . ,” we need not understand it to mean that He was the Word then; only that He whom we now know as the Word existed then, though unnamed and in a condition inscrutable to

us.

Thus the plain force of these inspired words is explained away and an exactly opposite meaning foisted upon them. The same argument can be applied moreover in other directions. Take, for instance, Romans 1: 3, which we have already referred to. "Son of God" is what He was: "Son of David" what He became. These mystics would reply, Yes, but Son of God is only a title that He acquired in Manhood, and used after this fashion without meaning that He really was Son of God before He became Son of David. In the extracts quoted it is suggested that, if the Spirit by the evangelist had wished to teach eternal Sonship He could have said, "He, who was Son, became flesh . . ." But supposing He had said this, what would have prevented the author of this error saying, Yes, but since Son is a title He acquired in Manhood, this only means that He, whom we now know to have become the Son, was made flesh?

There would have been nothing to prevent this. This subtle and dangerous argument could be used in many directions if it suited anyone's purpose to do so, and a Scripture, expressly forbidding the argument, would be needed; and even that might not suffice, for an argument might be discovered to nullify the prohibition. Now it is not God's way to hedge about His plain declarations with clauses forbidding all possible misunderstandings. Alas! there have always been teachers, "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4: 2); a very solemn consideration.

There are a few more points to notice: John 1: 18, for instance. If our Lord only became the Son in incarnation, it was only then that God became the Father. Hence the statement that being, "in the bosom of the Father," indicated "a position reached," and hence also the reasoning as to the preposition translated "in." The point as to the preposition is purely a matter of translation which must be left in the hands of really competent scholars. The Liddell and Scott lexicon deals with classical Greek, whereas the New Testament is written in Hellenistic Greek, the language of Greek-speaking Jews and the common people, the speech of the market place. Competent translators agree with what we have in our Authorised Version. The force of the preposition, we are told, is governed by the verb, "is."

It is not what our Lord became but what He **abidingly** is. "Timeless duration," is the phrase used by an undoubted Greek scholar. Moreover, it is not correct to speak of the Father's bosom as a "position." God the Father is a Spirit, and though **corporeal** expressions are used as to Him, the words have a spiritual import. John 1: 18 signifies that the only-begotten Son dwelt from all eternity in the full affections of the Father, was the Sharer of every thought and purpose of His heart, and hence was wholly competent to make Him known. He ever was in the Father's bosom; He was in it while serving in Manhood on earth; He is in it in His glorified Manhood today, and will be in it for ever.

One word as to John 1: 14. The expression "Only-begotten of the Father," and His "glory," coming in parenthetically, only enhance the wonder and fulness of all that was found in the Word become flesh. Now if "Only-begotten" only referred to His incarnation, it would be no enhancement of His glory, but rather the sign of His humiliation, and simply a reiteration of what had just been stated as to the Word becoming flesh. This is the first usage of the term, "Only-begotten," and it shows its significance as setting forth His supreme and infinite greatness in the Deity.

The doctrine that distinguishes the Gospel of John is the Deity of Jesus, coupled with the fact that in assuming Manhood He has taken the subject place. The Gospel was written that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20: 31) — "Son of God" being, as we saw in the fifth chapter, an assertion that He was equal with God, and therefore God. If He only became Son of God by reason of the virgin birth it is almost unthinkable that this Gospel, if written to convince that He did **become** the Son of God, should not mention the virgin birth.

A similar remark may be made as to Matthew 16: 16, 17. The recognition of Him as “Son of the living God,” is not to be reached by “flesh and blood,” though that was what He took by the virgin birth. It is reached only by Divine revelation, since that great Name connotes Deity and not humanity.

In this denial of the eternal Sonship, there appears to be an element, if not of unreality, at any rate of strange inconsistency. The denial was first uttered in 1929 and a few years after the “Little Flock” Hymnbook was again revised, so that all allusions to the eternal Sonship might be eliminated from it. We open a copy of this revised edition, and we find that the **very first line** of the **first hymn** is the following,

### **“Eternal King of those who reign,”**

which is, “Eternal King of kings” slightly paraphrased, a phrase that we do not find in Scripture. We read of God as “the King eternal” (1 Tim. 1: 17), but if we speak with care how can we attach eternity to the title, “King of kings”? For a title it is, assumed when kings had come into the realm of creation.

If it could be shown that kings have existed from eternity then the first line of the hymnbook might be accepted as correct. The Person, who is “King of kings,” is indeed eternal, but the title is one which clearly has reference to time when kings existed, so that as to it we can rightly apply the argument, which he wrongly applies to His sacred name, Son of God.

It strikes us as most extraordinary that a man, who put forth his denial of eternal Sonship as being new light shown by the Spirit, should sanction such an inconsistency in the very first line of the hymnbook so meticulously purged of what they considered to be a wrongful use of the adjective, **eternal**, as referring to the Son. His “light” must indeed have turned to darkness when he sanctioned this.

We close our remarks on this subject by saying that “Son” is not a title but a name, as Matthew 28: 19 shows. In that verse “name” is in the singular, and “Son” is a component part of that one great Name, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The Name Son is of most illustrious renown. The incarnation was an act of infinite condescension. To teach that His place of subjection is consequent upon His becoming the Son is false teaching of the gravest kind. The truth is that in becoming MAN He took the subject place, since subjection is of the very essence of perfection in man. He was made “a little lower than the angels,” not by becoming the Son, but by becoming Man, and that was, as another has said, “the assumption of a rank in the scale of being inconceivably more remote from His original glory, than is that of the meanest reptile from the loftiest angelic intelligence.” It is incongruous to the highest degree that so immense a stoop should originate a Name of most august import. No! From eternity to eternity, He is the SON.

We now turn to another matter. Years after the launching of this attack on our Lord's Sonship, there were reiterated teachings, as might have been expected, which challenged the full completion on the cross of His expiatory work.

Commenting on Genesis 3: 19:-

“The Lord had to go into the grave and enter into the full extent of God's judgment on man. It is important to keep the grave in mind as part of the vicarious sufferings of Christ in connection with the judgment of God.”

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“I believe this type is to impress upon us how real the Lord's death and burial were as atoning suffering.” (K. p. 46).

We have already given an extract in which this false idea occurred years ago, but this reaffirms it in a more definite way. To refute this false teaching, it will be quite sufficient to quote the Lord's own words, uttered upon the cross a moment before He delivered up His spirit “**It is finished.**” In claiming that burial and the grave were part of His atoning work, and so that work was not finished as He died, the speaker commits himself to a contradiction of our Lord's own words.

Again passing over some years we come to such extracts concerning the Holy Spirit as the following:-

“So I come now to the finish; that is, to this matter of singing in the wilderness at a certain time. It is a continuation of what began in Exodus, 'Then sang Israel this song, Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it.' The 'it' is something — the well — and the well is a type of the Spirit, no less than that, and the Spirit is in mind, in that sense in our song. He is a divine Person, and He is worthy of our acclamation in that sense.” (F. p. 234).

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“In dealing with the service of God and having part in it, we are to have discernment, to have intelligence in it, so that we know how to speak to God, to speak to Christ, to speak of the Spirit, and even to speak to the Spirit, although it is very rare in the Scriptures it is right, because Numbers 21: 17 says, 'Sing unto **it.**' 'Rise up well! sing unto it.' The 'it' is an allusion typically to the Spirit. Therefore, as knowing these things, we know how to speak to the Father, know **when** to speak to Him, and we know when to speak to the Son and how to speak to Him, and so we **may** speak **to** the Spirit as a divine Person, equal with the Father and the Son.” (L. p. 253).

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“The Lord is calling attention to the Holy Spirit in faithful and devoted service, for the end is near, and the Spirit has in mind that the assembly should go along with Him as Rebecca went with the servant. It was a question of committing herself to the servant . . . and as she did so the servant took her on, and I am sure if we will, in our minds and hearts, commit ourselves to what the Lord is raising at the present time the Spirit will help us. . . . It is all a question of sensitiveness and spirituality, and for that we need to do what Paul did, 'I bow my knees to the Father,' he says. It was no casual prayer but real genuine exercise, because the matter was so urgent. If we go on these lines we shall find the Spirit will serve us, and we shall be drawn out in our affections to Him, and as moving forward we shall find liberty and power to address Him. It is there in the Scriptures.” (M. for May, 1949).

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“Many things may seem new to us, but as the Lord is in what is being said as to the personality of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit is in it, we may be sure that confirmation will come, and if we are adjusted by the truth we shall be found in the current of it, so that our words will, in fact, become the word of God for the moment.” (M. for July, 1949).

What is here advocated is not new, for in the prayers of Christendom and in some of its hymns, the Holy Spirit has been invoked. Christians, however, who have been observant of the way Divine Persons are presented in Scripture, and of Their respective functions, have always refrained from addressing the Spirit. They have recognized that He is presented as the great subjective Worker in us, rather than the objective Person set before us.

We recognize that He dwells in the church as well as in the individual believer: that in the church He is sovereign in His manifestations and actions, according to 1 Corinthians 12 & 14. In both these chapters the Spirit is presented as operating in the various members of the body, but not as the One addressed by the members. So also in Philippians 3: 3, where the better reading is that we “worship by the Spirit of God.” Uniformly in the New Testament we find the Holy Spirit presented as the Power by which we worship and serve, and that as regards both the Father and the Son, but not as Himself the Object of worship or service or prayer.

In these extracts an attempt is made to support this wrong idea by referring to the incidents of Genesis 24 and Numbers 21. We quite believe that in both these Scriptures we have types of the Spirit and His service, but the deductions made from these types are unwarranted and far-fetched and destructive of the way the Spirit comes before us in the full light of the New Testament.

Any direct Scripture support for this idea is not to be found, and there is another display of that, which we saw much earlier in this pamphlet, a subtle belittling of Scripture in favour of the impressions of “spiritual men.” We are to find liberty and power to address the Spirit since, it is claimed, it is all there in the Scriptures concerning Rebecca and the servant; but even so, “it is all a question of sensitiveness and spirituality.”

Scripture is not entirely dispensed with, but the main emphasis is laid on “sensitiveness and spirituality,” or, what the speaker considers to be such. It comes to this: that if we are spiritually sensitive we shall accept the teaching, and to refuse it merely displays spiritual insensitiveness. Scripture is relegated to the background in order that mystical impressions may occupy the foreground.

The last extract of the four goes even further. The Spirit is assumed to be in the teaching in question, and confirmation of the teaching is expected, evidently by “spiritual sensitiveness” rather than from the Scriptures. In result, the words of those, who accept the teaching, will become “the word of God for the moment.” So apparently the words of those who accept and propound the teaching are to be regarded as on a par with the Holy Writings which have been given by inspiration of God.

This kind of talk is false and serious beyond anything that we can say. It comes dangerously near to that adding to the Divine words that is strongly denounced in Revelation 22: 18.

Another recent sample of how Scripture is contradicted is the following:-

“This dispensation is maintained by priesthood: The system as we spoke of it, for it is a system, is maintained by Christ in heaven. He is High Priest above, High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, which denotes that He is a divine Person. On the other hand, the system is maintained by the Holy Spirit here on earth. . . . So that we may count on the maintenance of the system until the end of the dispensation . . . . in the types, we have allusions to Christ ceasing to be **High Priest**. 'The death of the high priest which was anointed with the holy oil' is referred to in Numbers 35. That is, a certain thing happens; it is the termination of something. That would be so in the type, which refers to the ordinary high priest in Israel, but now we are speaking of Christ; not that He dies. He has died for sin once, but now He lives for ever. The figure just means that He ceases to be Priest.” (G. p. 251).

It has long been recognized that the death of the high priest in Israel, indicating a change in the priesthood, had a typical significance. When it occurred in the case of the manslayer (Num. 35: 25) he was free and could safely leave the city of refuge. So it will be for those “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Heb. 6: 18). When Christ comes forth from the heavenly sanctuary at His second advent He will take on the full Melchisedec character and cease functioning after the pattern of Aaron.

But though acting at present after the pattern of Aaron, as the Epistle to the Hebrews shows, He never was of the order of Aaron, which order is done away. He has been from the outset, “called of God an High Priest after the order of Melchisedec.” Now the original mandate from the lips of Jehovah ran thus: “Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110: 4). If Jehovah has said “a Priest FOR EVER,” how solemn the responsibility of the man who says, “He ceases to be Priest.”

This is another example, and a glaring one, of how these mystical teachers elevate their “spiritual sensibilities” and “impressions,” lowering thereby the Word of God to the point of contradicting it.

Yet remarkably enough, the speaker from whom we have just quoted, and from whom we have quoted a good deal, recently committed himself to this:-

“I would here warn against novelties. I am ashamed and alarmed at the novelties that are put out in readings and private conversations without any effort to support them by Scripture.” (M. for July, 1946).

This is a most remarkable utterance, and that for two reasons. First, because the speaker is known in the circles that follow him as the great purveyor of what they deem to be “new light,” in other words, he has himself originated more of “the novelties that are put out in readings” than any other person. We are left wondering why he should now be ashamed and alarmed about any such thing, unless it be that having helped to set the fashion, he now wishes to curb his followers, who are outdoing him in this line of things. We have long been ashamed and alarmed at the novelties that have appeared in his printed remarks, and even more so at the errors into which they have led him. We could wish that there were some sign of repentance as to what he himself has put out.

Second, the last clause strikes us as inferring that attitude to the Holy Scriptures that we have been resisting. He is troubled because those who are guilty of propounding these novelties make no attempt to support them from Scripture. If that really be so, his followers go further than he in their disregard for the Word of God. But has it been a satisfactory proceeding when, after putting out some novelty, the speaker has made an effort to support it from Scripture? It has only led to “handling the Word of God deceitfully,” such as is reprobated in 2 Corinthians 4: 2.

We have glanced at a small amount of the printed matter put out by this mystical school, and what have we found? Novel teachings are put out, which overthrow what has previously been taught as the Word of God — and the more they bear this character, the more eagerly they seem to be welcomed — and then Scripture is searched in the vain effort to find something to support them. That something is usually thought to be found as fancy and reasoning come into play. Is this the way we should handle the Word of God? Are we to expound our “spiritual impressions,” and then twist Scripture to support them? Our answer to this question is an emphatic — NO.

We take as ours the words of the Psalmist, and say, “How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!” (Psalm 139: 17). They are infinitely preferable to our thoughts — even our spiritual ones — and they are enshrined for us in the Holy Scriptures. Hence that great closing word from the Apostle Paul, “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3: 15-17). If we want teaching or need correction or instruction in righteousness, to the Holy Writings we go, and there we get it. To put out our thoughts, and then search Scripture in the effort to support them, is a certain road into error and false teaching. The road that leads to truth is that of having our thoughts formed by the Word of God, while distrusting our own.

We refrain from making further quotations, though they might be greatly multiplied. We have

given ample to show the tendencies and errors of this school of opinion. Their whole treatment of Scripture shows that they scan it through glasses set at a peculiar focus of their own. Anyone who has aimed at adjusting his own thoughts by the Scriptures and thus, thinking God's thoughts after Him, to have his own focal point set by the Word of God, may well be puzzled at first by many of the things we have quoted. This is because all their utterances are based upon a reading of Scripture through glasses set at the "subjective" focus, which makes all indefinite and hazy and mysterious, and many details positively wrong.

After all the Word of God did not come out from us. It came unto us only. Hence the really spiritual man neither **originates** nor **authenticates** anything. He **acknowledges** that the Scriptures are of binding importance as the commandments of the Lord. (See 1 Corinthians 14: 36, 37) This, we repeat, is the real spiritual man according to Scripture. He absolutely bows to Scripture. How different to the "spiritual man" of modern mysticism as revealed in these writings.

7.

## **A Brief Survey of the Teaching as a Whole, and of the Positive Testimony of the WORD OF GOD**

Before closing we invite the reader to take a broad and general survey of the field we have been traversing, so that we may end with some definite impression of what is at stake, and of what is truth as contrasted with mere imagination.

We observe that this teaching is nothing if not systematic. It is in fact a highly elaborated system, which true to the very nature of mysticism, keeps the thoughts of its votaries continually revolving around themselves. At first sight all seems very novel and original, but on closer inspection we find that the element of novelty mainly lies in the language, and that the underlying thoughts have very little originality about them. It is equally true to say that the spirit which breathes through both thoughts and language is that which is always found when systems or schools of opinion are founded. Alas! that men who have had as their birth-right so choice a setting forth of the full-orbed truth of God should have descended to this unbalanced and sectarian setting forth of one segment of the whole.

We do not write thus without some reason. As showing this, we append some extracts, all of which were written years ago before this particular school sprang into being. Each extract is from the pen of one whose words are of great weight — the late J. N. Darby.

"The mystic never has rest, because he vainly seeks in man what he ought to seek in God, who had accomplished all before he ever thought about it. . . . This is why the imagination plays so great a part in mysticism, and Satan can so often deceive by it, because the imagination and the heart of man are called into play. I do not say that spiritual affections are never there: . . . but you will find him after all, occupied with the affections and not with God Himself. It is the chief defect of mysticism. In a word, I see it in an effort of the human heart, trying to produce in itself something strong enough in the way of affection to satisfy a heart awakened by the excellence of its object. . ."

Again in writing of a very definite perversion of truth which in his day he had to encounter, he says:-

"This is one of the sad circumstances, as it strikes me, . . . important truths dealt with in so rash and daring a manner and the authority of the teacher leant upon for them, and his wildest notions put

upon the level of certainty with justification by faith; so that were his authority once shaken there would be danger that no one would know what was certain. It would be scepticism as to everything. So I have seen it with Roman Catholics. . . . I may add from my own experience that most decided legalism took the place of Christ and grace. . . . As to the teaching I heard . . . the one undeviating object seemed to be to teach differently from what brethren had taught . . . As at --- they treated what wonderfully blessed new light they had got as to their church position, so here it was taught that, as the brethren had first learnt brotherly unity and fellowship now they had been, as fresh instruction, led to church order. This church order was the authority of the teachers. . . . This came to such a pitch in these quarters that one brother, on these points being mooted, having urged that after all the Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures whether these things were so, he was answered by a young, and, as far as I know, very nice-hearted young man, who was associated in the ministry there, that it was Jews searching Jewish Scriptures, but that, now that God had raised up teachers and given gifts, all that was changed, and they must listen to the teachers . . . . "

At different times and in different connections, he also penned the following:-

"There are things which we enjoy by experience which are not acquired by experience; every sealed believer is in Christ before God, and his place is to know it (John 14), but there are those who do not through imperfect teaching. . . . We take the place by faith (beyond Jordan), but when taken we realize being in it by the Holy Ghost; and this is experience. It is not based on experience or progress in it. We are in it if in Christ."

"Christianity depends in its work on what it brings, not on what it finds; our side and relationship to God by it, wholly on what we find, not on what we bring. In a word, it is grace, not man, though he be formed and led by it. Thank God it is."

"Universal consent is another form of the substitution of man's authority for the Word of God, and the teaching of the Spirit of God in and by the word, and the responsibility of each saint to receive that word by such teaching; which alone constitutes faith. . . . It is the judgment of men, be they ever so many, and not the direct responsibility of the soul to God in receiving the word; nor the direct operation of the Spirit of God on the soul in respect of the word, which alone produces divine faith. It is faith in men. . . . For the mass of saints it must result in faith in the statements of the teacher, which is not faith in God at all. It will always be connected with receiving from teachers what they teach because God has raised them up . . . "

"If ministry is real it brings God directly to the conscience through the Word, whereas that which is false stands between God and the conscience."

These quotations bear as directly upon the points at issue as though they had been written today, and we ask the reader thoughtfully to consider them.

We believe that one of the worst features of the system of teaching we have been reviewing is its tendency to bring in man whether as a teacher or a "priest" between the conscience of the "ordinary believer" and the Lord, instead of bringing God directly to the conscience. It does indeed put man and ministry between God and the conscience. In a word, the whole system is, in effect, we judge, a highly elaborate, though perhaps unconscious effort, to divert saints from "holding the Head." (Col. 2: 18).

We now turn aside from the consideration of these teachings, for the review of what is unscriptural is more or less negative, and in conclusion we briefly summarize the positive testimony of the Word of God.

Take, for instance, the Epistle to the Romans. The order is first the objective setting forth of what

God is, and has done for us in Christ; then second that which is to be wrought in us experimentally by the Spirit by way of response. Later in the Epistle (chapter 12), we find exhortation, to the end that the saints may be stirred and moved towards the fulfilment, in their own cases, of all that which God purposes for them subjectively. To what does the Apostle appeal? What is the lever calculated to produce such mighty results? "I beseech you therefore, brethren," he says, "by the **mercies** of God." All that which God is objectively towards us is the lever, not what we may be subjectively towards Him.

Do we therefore belittle the work of the Spirit of God carried on progressively in the hearts of the saints? By no means. We believe it to be a very important part of truth, and one of the great objects of all true ministry, but at the same time we recognize that it is clearly the complement to truth that is objective.

In 1 Corinthians 2 we find that there are the things of God, which no man knows, "but the Spirit of God," — "things that are freely given to us of God." The Spirit Himself is given to us, "that we may **know** the things that are freely given to us of God." These wondrous things are given. They are ours, blessed be God! And we are to know them, not intellectually merely, but in spiritual power and enjoyment by the Spirit of God.

The same presentation of truth meets us in Galatians 4: 6, 7. "Ye are sons," said the Apostle, thus setting forth the great objective fact, and he added, for that very reason, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." The Spirit gives not the relationship, but the conscious response to the relationship. The Galatians had made but little progress subjectively. Indeed they had as a whole slipped back into legalism, and were "fallen from grace." Still the Apostle does not hesitate to apply to their hearts objective truth, and that twice over, saying not only, "ye are sons," but also, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Gal. 4: 7).

We pass from Galatians to Ephesians, and though a far more exalted presentation of truth meets us here, yet we find the same order; it is **first**, the calling of God, a thing wholly above and outside of us; **second**, we find that we are to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of His calling.

Lastly, we refer to the closing epistles — 2 Timothy; 2 Peter; and 1 John. In each the last days are contemplated, and we are confronted with just the same feature.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to Timothy, was addressing one who beyond all contradiction was a "spiritual man." The whole purpose of the Epistle is to lift the thoughts of Timothy from himself to God's "purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began;" by which purpose and grace we have been saved and called with an holy calling. That which is irrevocably and eternally established "in Christ Jesus" characterizes the whole Epistle, as does also the value of the God-breathed Scriptures. We may well speak of "The impregnable rock of Holy Scripture." There is nothing impregnable nor rock-like about the conceptions and impressions of the "spiritual men," about whom we have heard so much.

The Apostle Peter begins his second Epistle by referring to that which has been bestowed upon us by God and by our Saviour Jesus Christ. We "have obtained . . . precious faith." By His Divine power there have been given unto us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness;" and also "exceeding great and precious promises." Here are glorious objective facts, and upon that basis we are exhorted to the development of a suited subjective state: to "add" to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity. Peter's ministry was a pastoral one, and he closes by

reminding us that the state and behaviour proper to the faith of Christ is only produced in the power of those great realities which the grace of God has bestowed.

The Apostle John from another standpoint witnesses to the same truth. For him everything hinges upon the revelation that has reached us from the beginning--from the incarnation of the Son of God. Then the Father was revealed; then the life was manifested. The manifestation was in a Person so objectively revealed that He could be heard, seen and handled. Everything is to be tested by that. The thing is now to be "true" not only "in Him," but in us also (2: 8). The life in absolute fulness is in Him: in us it is for the present modified by the fact that still we have the flesh in us. But to tamper with that which came out in its fulness in Him from the beginning is the spirit of antichrist, as chapter 2 shows. In the Epistle there are many references to what "we know." Yet the closing word is to present the only One, who is the great Object for our hearts — "This is the true God, and eternal life."

No wonder the Apostle's closing word is "Children, keep yourselves from idols." An idol is anything that would dethrone Christ in our hearts. Let us beware lest we make an idol of a "spiritual man."

Many other Scriptures might be adduced. What is really needed is to avoid making one's subjective impressions any kind of a standard, to cease imputing to them any kind of authority. If we have Divinely-given impressions well and good; let us be thankful. Let us remember, however, that Scripture alone is the infallible standard, and consequently that it alone will enable us to test our impressions and determine whether they really proceed from the Spirit of God, or whether they are but the fruit of mere mentality.

May the Lord be pleased to own this small effort to contend for the simplicity of the faith. We close with the following words of another well-known servant of God:-

"Occupation with our state will never bring us one whit nearer the Lord; it will only distress, enfeeble and enslave our souls. Occupation with Christ will produce every moment increasing conformity to His image. The true remedy therefore for a bad state is Christ so completely filling our vision, Christ in what He is and in what He has done, that self cannot be seen in the light of His glory. State is not everything, but CHRIST IS EVERYTHING: and in proportion as we learn this lesson will our state meet His mind."