

THE DUALISM OF ETERNAL LIFE: A Revolution in Eschatology

By S. S. Craig

INTRODUCTION

A very few words must suffice by way of introduction to the contents of this volume. The ground covered is new, the study is original, the truths dealt with are the most momentous conceivable to the human mind. On this account I ask for that kind and degree of consideration which is due to those who seek to recover truth once known, but long lost and in its essential nature quite uncongenial to the natural heart of man.

In the summer of 1892 a book was placed in my hand with a request that I read it. The title was "Israel My Glory," by the Rev. John Wilkinson, president of the Mildmay Mission to the Jews. The reading of that book marked an epoch in my life. From that time forward my outlook on the character and destiny of the Church and the world began to be revolutionized, and the process still continues its panoramic unfolding with ever deepening amazement and ever increasing joy. Year by year the beauties and verities and glories of the Word of God, both written and Living, have slowly but surely tightened their celestial grip on my soul, until with some tangible degree of appreciation I can enter into the spirit of the great Apostle of the Gentiles when he exclaimed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out." I have never known, even before conversion, what it was to doubt the truth of God's word. But when the new light dawned in 1892 and I began to see how fearfully I had been deceived and misled concerning the character of the present age as portrayed by infallibly inspired prophets and apostles, I was led to wonder if I had not been misinformed by "Mother Church" on other equally important subjects; and experience has taught me that this suspicion had a wondrously solid basis in fact. As a consequence I began to see that there was a faith which was nothing more than an easily going Laodicean indifference, whose proper name was heathenish credulity; and that on the other hand there was a skepticism which was one of the most essential elements in the highest order of Christian virtue.

Thus, while never doubting the truth of God's word, I have been led to doubt men's opinions concerning it. And one mark of said doubt is that it is both subjective and objective. My own opinion as a man is no better or worse than the opinion of any other man, except as it agrees or disagrees with the facts of the revelation of God in Christ; for in Him we have absolute truth so far as the revelation goes. It will yet go much further and deeper and higher.

In the study of God's word, especially during the last fifteen years, I have been learning to put more and more emphasis on three points:

1. To make sure that I had the proper translation of the original.
2. To make equally sure of the proper interpretation of the right translation. The former is of little value without the latter.
3. To make especially sure of the proper application of a given passage after I had assured myself that I had given due attention to the first and the second.

All three are abundantly illustrated in this volume. Here, at the final analysis, is the test of genuine scholarship, and in the exact application of these three vital principles we will discover the proof as to whether a given preacher or theologian is, or is not, living in vital union with the Great Head of the Church.

While the nature of the discussion necessitated somewhat frequent reference to the original languages in which both Testaments were written, I wish to disown any pretension to expert knowledge in either. Fortunately this was not necessary. Besides, if the following argument proves anything it is that the men who have claimed expert knowledge in these lines have shamefully erred, and thereby deceived the people of God, and that generation after generation for hundreds of years. The essence of the problem of the knowledge of God lies in the fact that theology, unlike the abstract sciences, say mathematics, is a most concrete affair, involving the normal operation of the mind, the will and the heart. Thus the real causes of failure to properly interpret the word of God lie back of the mind in the region of volition and affection. There is nothing in man stronger than his affections and in proportion as these are fixed in an evil direction truth and righteousness and God are excluded and the doors of the heart firmly barricaded heavenward.

We are living in tremendously critical days when all eyes are focused on the greatest military conflict in the history of the world. Throughout a very large portion of the earth militarism is triumphant. The world problems of today are not new. They are old as the history of the race. Owing, however, to the commercial federation of the nations and the advance of science in all kinds of invention, and in the production of wealth, the problems which were once local, or at most provincial, have taken on an imperial and cosmopolitan character. In proportion as the world-system has become organized for commercial purposes and that on a basis of legalized lawlessness, the nations have found it necessary to strengthen by means of armies and navies the dams they had built to hold back,

if possible, the threatening floods of illegalized lawlessness. But the higher and stronger they built they only increased the pressure; and now, as was inevitable, the dams are giving way in all directions, and the result is universal anarchy merging into universal chaos.

But the most significant sign on the world's brooded horizon at the present time is not found in international politics, nor in the devious and treacherous methods of international diplomacy; no, nor yet in thunder and smoke and hilarious intoxication of militarism. Where then? [It is] in the desperately corrupt condition of modern theology. Only a few days ago three examined candidates for the Christian ministry, were being examined before the New York Presbytery with a view to ordination; and, so says the report, they, verbally and in writing, affirmed their disbelief in the Virgin Birth of the Christ and in the Resurrection, and in this tremendously far reaching negation of the very foundations of Christianity they were substantially upheld by the Court. This has its significance in that it is symptomatic of a general condition throughout the religious world. In comparison with this daring attitude of men to God and His Christ, the world's greatest military conflict, considered as an exhibition of brute forces, is nothing more than a transient episode.

Reviewing the history of Christendom for the last sixteen hundred years, there is one thing that men seem determined to do at any cost; and that is that they will not listen to what the God of Heaven and Earth has said, and is still saying, concerning the character and course and doom of modern civilization. Politicians, economists, educationists, scientists, and last, but not least, the theologians, vie with one another in their eulogy of the possibilities and perfections of humanity by what they are pleased to call education and culture. But listen to what Jehovah hath said:

“Therefore wait ye upon Me, saith Jehovah, until the day that I rise up to the prey; for My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger; for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zeph. 3:8; see also Rev. 19:11-21).

The present world-war is but the prelude to a deeper and bloodier tragedy; and the root cause of it all is ecclesiastical antichristianism, materialized commercialism, political opportunism, and general, practical atheism. There never yet was, and there never can be, a war that did not have its basis, at the last analysis, in a false relation of men, and churches, and governments to God and His Christ. Never was there a nation that suffered more, through war or any other cause, than it deserved to suffer, as a nation, in order to square its accounts with God for national sins. When the equation is squared the account will be

cancelled. There is no future hell for nations as such; hence the necessity for squaring the accounts here and now.

SOME EXPLANATIONS

As this book is written specially for laymen I feel disposed to make a few explanatory remarks:

1. The thought moves almost constantly within the lines of that branch of theology which is technically called eschatology. This term is derived from two Greek words; namely, the adjective *eschatos* (ἔσχατος), meaning, last; and the noun *logos* (λόγος), meaning, speech, or discourse. That is, discourse on the last things: That department of Bible knowledge which treats of the culmination of the present age, of death and judgment, heaven and hell; the intermediate state and the eternal state.
2. In reference to the Second Coming of Christ Christians are divided into two schools: The Premillennial and The Postmillennial. The first syllable in each word is a preposition: *Pre* meaning “before”; and *Post* meaning “after”. The other two roots are *mille* a thousand, and *annus* a year. Both schools agree that before the end of the world there is to be a thousand years of universal peace, according to Rev. 20:1-6. The former say that the Second Coming will take place before the millennium, and will be the cause of its introduction. The latter say that the Second Coming will not take place till after the millennium, and that it is path of the mission of the Church in the world to introduce it by the preaching of the Gospel, by education and moral reform. The two theories, if I may so call them, are really two systems of interpreting the Bible and are as different and antagonistic as light and darkness.
3. The Greek word *aiōn* (αἰὼν) is usually rendered into English as “aeon”, or “eon”. I prefer, however, to retain all the letters and simply substitute the English as above. The “o” is long and is equivalent to *aiōon*. But except where the plural forms occur we will spell it with one o.

I have no thought of claiming that the work is free from mistakes. Pressure of other work will account for some of them, and human infirmity for others. But of one thing I am certain: The main line of argument which runs through the book is established and will never be overthrown, for it rests securely on the immutable word of God. The beloved evangelist concludes his Gospel with the words:

THESE THINGS ARE WRITTEN THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE.

To believe is to know. Bible truth was given to be known, and after one has spent many years in the School of Christ (Luke 14:25-35) it is possible and permissible, and honoring to God, to say "I KNOW"; and to go even beyond that and declare, "I KNOW, and I KNOW that I KNOW." And to do so is neither presumption nor egotism. And he, who knows that he knows, also knows that the man at the other end of the line does not know what he thinks he knows (1 John 4:6). The positive and negative phases of truth are so related that the thinker cannot be more definite at one end than at the other. This relation, even though by way of antithesis, is involved in the very nature of subject and object. Affirmation and negation must go hand in hand so long as we live in a world like this.

It was my wish to dwell at some length on the considerable volume of literature on the subject of biblical eschatology which has come from the orthodox press during the last few years and to point out its essentially rationalistic character; but space will not permit at present. By the way, that word "orthodox" may be used in two different senses: (1) that which is right (*orthos*) according to Bible Standards; and (2) that which is right according to Church creeds; or, better still, that which expresses the general consensus of Church opinion at the present time. The word is used exclusively in the latter sense in this volume.

It is a matter of fundamental importance to recognize the wide gulf which separates apostolic from post-apostolic Christianity; and especially from present day Christianity. In confirmation of this fact I will cite a quotation from a Churchman of high standing, in the hope that it may set some person thinking:

"The first period is that which contains the great question, almost the greatest which ecclesiastical history has to answer,-how was the transition effected from the age of the Apostles to the age of the Fathers, from Christianity as we see it in the N. T., to Christianity as we see it in the next century, and as, to a certain extent we have seen it ever since? No other change equally momentous has ever affected its fortunes, yet none has ever been so silent and secret. This chasm once cleared we find ourselves approaching the point where the story of the Church once more becomes history-becomes once more the history, not of an isolated community, or of isolated individuals, but of an organized society incorporated with the political systems of the world." --Stanley's *History of the Eastern Church*.

Just think of her who should have been the Virgin Bride of Christ thus playing the harlot so shamelessly. But here type and antitype perfectly agree

(Ezekiel 16 and Revelation 2 and 3). It is to the faithful in these conditions of apostasy that the Holy Spirit appeals so significantly in 2 Cor. 6:14-18. These are awfully solemn words. "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13). But let us see to that we do not take the spirit of the camp with us. Dean Stanley never wrote truer words than those contained in the above quotation. Between apostolic and historical Christianity there is a great gulf fixed, and John and Peter and Paul are saying "they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence (except by the way of the Cross)." Education and culture are no substitutes for atonement and the new birth.

If anyone should affirm that the tone of the book is pessimistic, I both admit and deny the charge. So far as the possibilities of any moral uplift of humanity are dependent on legislation, education and culture, while the whole world lies in the wicked one (1 John 5:19), I am incurably pessimistic; as hopelessly so as the weeping prophet of Judah's Babylonian captivity was of political and religious conditions in his day. But from the standpoint of the prospects of humanity under the kingly rule of the Christ of God, now about to be inaugurated, I am as optimistic as the sweet Singer of Israel; as hopeful as was he who interpreted the night vision of Babylon's greatest king and foretold the rise and fall of successive Gentile nations and empires until He come whose right it is to rule the nations of the earth; yea, as hopeful as was the lonely Seer in Patmos when in the two last chapters of his sublime Apocalypse he proclaimed in letters of fire and garniture of gold and sweetest cadences of celestial choristers the unutterable bliss of consummating and consummated redemption.

In this hope I commit the book to the winds and the waves of the world's adverse criticism, and to the scorn of its silent contempt; but at the same time to the care of Him Who hath His way in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and Whose footsteps are not known; and Who, in a little while, will say to the warring nations of earth, "Peace!, Be Still!," and to the world's Babylonian chaos, "Let there Be Light!", and that word of command which called Lazarus from the dead will do what all the armies and navies of the world have never done and never can do. Till then, let us wait, and watch, and work.

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