

New Testament Theology or Historical Account of the Teaching of Jesus and of Primitive  
Christianity According to the New Testament Sources  
Dr. Willibald Beyschlag  
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Beyschlag's *New Testament Theology* is a comparatively recent publication even in the original, the first volume having appeared in 1891, the second in 1892. The promptness with which the book has been translated and offered to English readers is an indication of its high excellence. Among the qualities of the author which have contributed to furnish his work with a special attractiveness should be counted highest of all, an extraordinary lucidity of statement. Except where a subject is inherently obscure or the author pleads a desperate cause, we find him conveying his thought in language which in point of transparency leaves nothing to be desired. To this is added a remarkable beauty of style not merely from the scientific but even from the aesthetic point of view. It is a delight to read this book. There are passages in it which captivate like poetry. But also in the larger art of handling his subject and grouping his material so as to make a historical movement pass before us as in living reality, the author is scarcely second to any one. In the preface, Beyschlag justifies the publication of his book alongside the much-used work of Weiss, on the ground that the latter cannot be called a historical account in any proper sense. The difference between the two books is certainly very great and it must be admitted that, however high may be the value of Weiss' *New Testament Theology* as a book for study and reference, Beyschlag succeeds better in the description of the historical process as a whole. Owing to this feature his book, while easily read, yet stimulates and invites to study. In almost every case the problems are presented in such a masterful manner that their complicated character ceases to deter the student and evokes new interest even in the more experienced reader. It is to be regretted that here and there the author's great facility of expression and the poetical character of his thought tempt him to substitute indefinite phraseology for a sober solution of the problems. Occasionally also his historical tact forsakes him and he attributes to the Biblical authors forms of thought and opinions, which by their inherent modern character betray their subjective origin. For example, in the exegesis Matt. 18:10 the poetic interpretation of words of Jesus is carried to such a length as this: "In every child of man a peculiar thought of God has to be realized, which stands over his history like a genius, or guardian spirit, and which God at all times remembers, so that everything which opposes its realization on earth comes before Him as a complaint."

Beyschlag occupies a middle position between the two camps of advanced criticism and what in Germany is called the conservative school. What he disapproves of in the advanced critics is their lack of sobriety and modesty, and their infatuation with destructive theorizing for no other reason than that it supplants the traditional. On the other hand, while in the main identifying himself with the Mediation Theology, he does not hesitate to pronounce upon it the sharp judgment that "with a few exceptions, instead of applying a bold Biblical criticism to the traditional doctrine, it has half-excused, half-concealed its own deviations from it." There is truth in this charge and the author was fully justified in making it, for he himself takes not the slightest pains to conceal his departures from the consensus of Protestant doctrine. Not only does he everywhere formulate the difference as sharply as possible, but we feel in reading that a certain animus against the church doctrine is never wholly absent. Of course his antipathy to criticism relates only to its most extreme form. Beyschlag rejects the accounts of our Lord's early life in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, and accepts the prevailing theory of the origin of the Synoptic Gospels from two sources. While one of the most

strenuous and successful defenders of the fourth Gospel, he thinks its vindication impossible on any other view than that the Apostle's subjectivity has largely colored and modified his reproduction of the words of Jesus. Of the Pauline writings all but the Pastoral Epistles are held to be genuine. The order in which the various types of doctrine are discussed is the following: The teaching of Jesus according to the Synoptic and the Johannine records separately; the views of the first Apostles, James and Peter (the second Epistle being rejected); Paul; the Epistle to the Hebrews; the Apocalypse; Johannine conceptions according to the Epistles and the fourth Gospel; and, under the heading of Post-Apostolic modes of teaching, the Synoptic Gospels, Jude, 2 Peter and the Pastoral Epistles.

As has been remarked, Beyschlag takes occasion in many instances to point out discrepancies between Scriptural teaching and the church doctrine. The Biblical writers knew of no Trinity, of no divine nature of Christ in the metaphysical sense, of no personal Holy Spirit, of no vicarious satisfaction, and consequently of no justification on the ground of imputed righteousness. In most of these and other instances the author's own view shines through his criticism of the church doctrine, so as to give the impression that the agreement between his personal convictions and the Biblical teaching is a tacit assumption. In the case of one who deals with Biblical Theology as a history of revelation, and considers the fact of a view being taught by a Biblical writer sufficient ground for its adoption by himself, this would be entirely natural. But Beyschlag does not occupy this position. He recognizes a large element of human imperfection in the Bible. And yet everywhere he uses this imperfect Bible as a basis of attack on the teaching of orthodox theology. We cannot help thinking that, but for this, the author would have found more frequent occasion to profess his own dissent from alleged inadequacies of Biblical teaching. As it is, many will be inclined to suspect that he has, unconsciously of course, made his own views the standard, and striven to approximate the views of the Biblical authors to them as much as possible. The appearance of so many of the distinctive tenets of the Mediation Theology in the garb of views of Christ and Paul and others of the Biblical writers would favor this assumption. In determining, what is the view of a Biblical author, Beyschlag further frequently adduces external philosophical or dogmatic considerations. So, e.g., we are told that the juridical doctrine of satisfaction attributed to Paul rests on an insoluble arithmetical problem; that it would be strange if God had made arrangements to purchase those who were in debt to Himself; that it would not be real penal righteousness to let the guilty go free and punish the innocent in his stead; that we cannot entertain the idea of God's treating with infinite love people whom He at the same time hated. It is perfectly clear that, in all these cases, the author has abandoned the historical standpoint and, instead of asking what Paul would have considered an insoluble problem or strange arrangements on the part of God or real penal righteousness or a possible consistency of love and wrath, has simply applied his own judgment in these matters to the words of the Apostle. Such statements, of course, deprive the polemic against the church doctrine of much of the historical force which it might have seemed to possess had the facts been left to speak for themselves. Polemics, if allowed a place in the field of Biblical Theology, should avoid every appearance of animosity and will usually be effective in proportion to their indirectness.

We are inclined to think that the exegetical basis of the book is weakest on those very points which are treated in a more or less controversial spirit. Especially is this true at the treatment of Christ's preexistence and the Pauline doctrine of the atonement. In regard to the former Beyschlag takes great pains to show that the main body of the fourth Gospel is entirely free from the advanced Christology of the prologue. Of course this cannot be done without some exegetical *tours de force*, by which the

notion of an ideal preexistence is extracted from the well-known passages. In the case of Paul the same notion is made use of to tone down the significance of the Apostle's most explicit utterances on the subject. Paul's idea of preexistence is represented as a mere development from the pre-Christian Logos-idea, sustaining hardly any vital relation to the rest of his Christological conceptions, so that, when subtracted from the latter, it will leave them unimpaired. From this the author further argues to the radical difference between the later church doctrine and the Pauline Christology, because subtraction of the divine factor from the church view overthrows the whole scheme. But on the one hand even from Beyschlag's own standpoint, the Pauline Christ assumes such superhuman proportions and has so far outgrown the ordinary conception of a Jewish Messiah, that a thinker like Paul cannot have failed to make his origin commensurate with his subsequent exaltation. Nothing short of a real heavenly preexistence in the form of God could have appeared to Paul a sufficient basis for supporting the superstructure of his doctrine of the glorified Christ and his cosmical significance. On the other hand it seems to us that there is an element in Beyschlag's representation of the Pauline view which is not merely indifferent to the preexistence, but inconsistent with it. We refer to his statement that the unity of Christ with God was not complete from the first but subject to a gradual growth. Now, inasmuch as in this unity consisted his divine sonship, there is evidently no place for a perfected sonship in a preexistent state, for with the Kenotic theories Beyschlag has no sympathy. The modern form of thought underlying this whole construction of the Pauline Christology may be best seen from the statements in vol. ii, p. 88, where the significance of the speculative development of the idea of preexistence is found in the fact that the union of the divine and human which brings humanity to its ideal perfection, and which from the historical standpoint comes last, as the name "Second Adam" indicates, was from God's point of view the first idea, from which His whole government of the world and even its creation must be understood. The notion of ideal preexistence serves the same purpose here which is usually served by that of the incarnation in the Mediating Theology.

On the whole the treatment at Paul's teaching, though containing many beautiful and forcible passages, is not equally successful with other parts of the work. It is throughout vitiated by the persistent attempt to ascribe to Paul a moral influence theory of the atonement, and a corresponding view of justification, which makes it consist in mere forgiveness of sins conditioned on incipient sanctification, that is, on the breach with sin effected in principle and guaranteed for the future by identification in faith with Christ. This cuts the nerve of Paulinism in its two most central doctrines. As is customary with defenders of the moral influence theory, the explanation of the manner in which the moral influence which breaks sin and pledges the willingness of God to forgive proceeds from the death of Christ, is vague and obscure in the extreme. The treatment of the classical passages in which Paul has formulated his view of atonement is painful to witness, and the same must be said of the discussion of the passages from 1 Peter in the first volume. Beyschlag conducts his argument chiefly on the following lines. He first establishes the facts that according to Paul Christ's death has not merely a justifying but also a sanctifying effect, and that these two effects proceed from it in organic unity. Further, that the redeeming work of Christ is not a fact accomplished once for all, but a dynamic principle working through the living, exalted Christ. This part of the argument is strong and forcible. Then, however, he assumes that this twofold effect in its organic unity, and this dynamic character of the Saviour's work, are irreconcilable with the church view of vicarious atonement. It may be that theologians have not always sufficiently emphasized these two features of Paul's teaching, but we venture to say that the church view admits of a presentation in which both

of these are done equal if not greater justice than in the moral influence theory. In Romans 8:3, a passage of which Beyschlag makes much, the judgment of sin in the flesh is not simply the killing of sin, but the judicial killing of it, and Paul has evidently chosen this very term *κατακρινειν* to indicate the organic unity of the two sides of Christ's work: the breaking of guilt and the breaking of the power of corruption, in such a way that the latter proceeds from the former. Beyschlag overlooks the peculiar choice of the term and the judicial element implied in it, limits the sense of the expression to the sanctifying effect of Christ's death, and thus makes it appear as if in Paul's mind justification depended on sanctification. Paul's view in this and other passages evidently is, that the canceling of our guilt in Christ's death is the objective cause of the subjective breaking of the power of sin within us. In other words, our dying with Christ proceeds logically from Christ's dying for us, and herein lies the organic unity of the two acts of salvation. It goes without saying that the distorted view of Beyschlag entails a modification of the Pauline conception of faith. The principle of *justificatio propter fidem* is defended as Pauline. Faith in itself attracts the divine love and grace.

It was not to be expected that the doctrine of absolute election should have found grace in Beyschlag's sight. He rejects it as un-Pauline, and that because the Apostle's view everywhere recognizes the freedom and responsibility of man in the choice of salvation. Nevertheless it is claimed that Paul believed in the ultimate salvation of all. The reconciliation of these two ideas in the Apostle's mind is conceived of after this fashion: that God by providential arrangements so guides the life of individuals and nations as to make in the end the free choice of salvation the only thing possible, or, as the author characteristically puts it, "God's loving wisdom narrows man's choice, and finally, like a victorious chess-players can shut him up to the one course." This, it seems to us, brings in again the essence of the repudiated doctrine of predestination, inasmuch as the certainty of salvation on this basis rests with God ultimately. With the freedom which others prize so highly, and for the sake of which they reject or distort the Pauline idea of election, this freedom in which man is narrowed down to one choice has very little in common. The only difference between Beyschlag and the church doctrine here, is that the narrowing process is conceived of in a different way. Owing to Beyschlag's views of sin and grace it is carried out by providential arrangements, by indirect means, in a moral way. According to Augustinianism it is accomplished by supernatural, transforming grace. Beyschlag thinks that there attaches a special majesty to this alleged Pauline conception of God narrowing man down to a choice of salvation by indirect means; we believe, on the contrary, that the Augustinian idea of God as *Creator Spiritus* compares favorably with that of God as a victorious chess-player.

There are several other points on which we should like to touch did not space forbid. We are glad to state in conclusion that the translation of the book is excellent. Its best praise consists in saying that it has succeeded in reproducing the great charm and fluency of the author's style. Here and there only has the translator misunderstood the original; although sometimes he has even put into his mouth the very opposite of what he wishes to say. We have observed the following instances: Vol. i, p. 43, where the sentence should read: "they preferred to speak in the abstract religious sense of the Malechut Jahve and Malechut Schamajim *as* (and not '*rather than of*') the kingships of Jehovah." Page 77 where the original means: "his life must be conceived rather as a development from original innocence to completed holiness, as the continuous preservation (not '*than as* the continuous preservation') of a disposition originally at one with God, etc." Page 138 *note*, where the German *entnimmt* meaning *removes* is rendered by *answers*. Page 233 to "in both of the passages adduced," the words "as if" should be prefixed, which will of course radically change the meaning. Vol. ii, p. 78

“except that He had in addition a divine nature existing alongside of them” should be “and he has not added to these a divine nature existing alongside of them.” Page 200 “rather we must give to the communication of the Spirit . . . a place in the process of becoming a believer which presupposes the απελουσασθε, etc.,” ought to read “which is presupposed by the απελουσασθε, etc.” But these are little blemishes which do not detract from the excellence of the translation as a whole. We note them for the benefit of those English readers who have no access to the original. Perhaps even now the publishers might insert a slip making the necessary corrections.