

The Christology of St. Paul
G. Nowell Rostron
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Rostron's book offers a good survey of the problems of Paulinism so far as these are viewed in relation to the orthodox faith of the church. It does not deal with the Christology alone, as the title might lead to expect, but, on the principle that the Person and the work are inseparable and react and cast light one on the other, it draws within the purview of the discussion the whole range of soteriology. It was inevitable under these circumstances that the treatment of many topics, and some of these of the first importance, should become somewhat general and sketchy crowding out some large aspects of the Christological question itself and much more or less relevant detail throughout. New points of view are not presented, but the author shows himself familiar with the recent literature bearing on his subject. His standpoint is that of the Nicene faith in regard to theology proper, and in regard to soteriology he upholds the vicarious interpretation of the atonement as genuinely Pauline. As to the sources of Paul's teaching, while making allowance for the Jewish and Hellenistic element and the primitive Christian tradition, he takes the principial ground that the Apostle's doctrine is a transcript of his life or experience. To some extent this is undoubtedly true and to emphasize it is necessary over against the older intellectualizing of the process which gave birth to the specifically Pauline ideas. On the other hand we believe it is easy to go too far in this direction and to make such a general recourse upon the experience cover up the existence of problems which yet wait for a solution. Unless the experience be taken in a very specific sense of the reception of supernatural knowledge, it fails in many places to explain the product which is supposed to have issued from it, because on closer examination the ideas resulting are seen already to be inherent in and indispensable to the experience. If on the other hand experience be taken as the correlate of supernatural communication, why not call it revelation, and explicitly acknowledge that in a very important sense Paul's doctrine was not subjectively developed by him, but received per modum revelationis strictly so called.

The most recent phase upon which the study of Paul has entered through the comparison of the mystical side of his teaching with alleged analogous trains of thought in the mysteries hardly receives the prominence which at the present juncture it deserves. It is touched upon only in a passing way and the general opinion expressed that merely the form and in no sense the substance of the ideas involved is derivable from the source. Here especially the lack of genetic treatment or the reduction of all genesis to experience makes itself disadvantageously felt. Those who make much of the indebtedness of Paul to Hellenistic syncretism derive from that source not merely the form but the substance of the mystical side of the Apostle's teaching itself, or at least maintain that he drew it from the general atmosphere, out of which also the mystery-religions grew up and in which they thrived. In view of this it is of some importance to consider whether the ideas in question cannot be as naturally or even more naturally explained as a legitimate outgrowth of previous factors inherent in pre-Pauline revelation; the general category of experience hardly suffices in this connection.

There are some detailed points in regard to which the author in our opinion deviates from the excellent exegetical and doctrinal judgment which on the whole his work exhibits. It is hardly permissible to grant that the εἰς οὐρανοῦ of 1 Cor. 15:47 may have an implied reference to the preexistent heavenly state, and yet to controvert the view that the preexistent Christ possessed a

human element in His make-up. For the reference in the passage is distinctly and pointedly to the “*Second Man*”, and there is no logical escape from Dr. Edwards’ conclusions, except by insisting upon it, that the Apostle here speaks of the genesis of the glorified Christ through the resurrection and that the preexistence does not come into view at all, a position which is exegetically also the most plausible, and to which Rostron himself a little later on seems to incline. In discussing the famous Christological passage Phil. 2:5 ff. the author makes the hazardous statement that “so far as Christ by the necessities of His life on earth was obliged to limit the exercise of His cosmical functions, so far did God the Father directly and mediately take them upon Himself” (p. 128), and thus would seem to fall in with a certain type of Kenoticism with reference to which in the preceding discussion on the whole his attitude is rather reserved than otherwise. In his revulsion from the neo-Apollinarianism of Sanday, who would make the Deity fill the place of the subliminal consciousness of the human Christ, the author seems to go too far in discrediting the subconscious as an integral element in the religious nature. We would hesitate to subscribe to the statement that “the subconscious . . . has no moral character in itself.” On other points, we are glad to notice modern vogues in the interpretation of Paul are resisted, e.g., the shifting of the emphasis from the crucifixion to the incarnation, which Westcott has done so much to popularize.

The book can render excellent service to all students of the Apostle’s teaching who feel in need of reassuring themselves of the substantial agreement of Paulinism with the historic faith of the Protestant church. In the discussion about the continuity between Jesus and Paul the other charge so frequently made, that Protestantism is a quasi-Paulinism and not a genuine reproduction of the great Apostle’s teaching, should not be lost out of view. That we are in accord with Paul is as important a principle to maintain as that Paul was in accord with the Master.