

THE DEFERRED CONCLUSION OF MANY MEETINGS

FOREWORD

In considering "Jesus Christ as fulfilment of Torah and Prophets" the theme of this conference I would like to focus not on the Biblical demonstration of this but on the historical and present problem of the recognition of this fulfilment. I thought initially to concentrate on the Early Christian apologists and their approach but in rereading St Justin the Philosopher's "Dialogue with Trypho" I was most struck by the moment at the conclusion when the two debaters separate without having come to agreement and yet having felt that agreement was very near...

So the following thoughts.

1)

From Genesis 33

"Then Esau said, "Let us journey on our way, and I will go before you." But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the flocks and herds giving suck are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle which are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Se'ir."

<i>Jacob, always the trickster figure, had cheated Esau of his birthright and meeting his brother after years, feared him. They embrace but Jacob fears to follow Esau to his home at Mount Seir and having said he will follow turns aside to another place and the brothers meeting remains incomplete even one may say until today...</i>

(2)

From the Dialogue of Justin the Philosopher(Christian)with Trypho(Jewish) 2nd century

Then Trypho, after a little delay, said, "You see that it was not intentionally that we came to discuss these points. And I confess that I have been particularly pleased with the conference; and I think that these are of quite the same opinion as myself. For we have found more than we expected, and more than it was possible to have expected. And if we could do this more frequently, we should be much helped in the searching of the Scriptures themselves. But since," he said, "you are on the eve of departure, and expect daily to set sail, do not hesitate to remember us as friends when you are gone."

"For my part," I replied, "if I had remained, I would have wished to do the same thing daily. But now, since I expect, with God's will and aid, to set sail, I exhort you to give all diligence in this very great struggle for your own salvation, and to be earnest in setting a higher value on the Christ of the Almighty God than on your own teachers."

<i>And so the one of the Old Way remains in place and the one of the New Way sets sail, as it were in the sea of Time, and at the end the talk will resume one supposes...or of course in many

good places and times has...yet like the parting of the brothers Jacob and Esau, in effect "we will meet again a little further up the road", it seems to have a symbolism.</i>

(3)

From the Book of the Gentile by Ramon Llull 1280

<i>A 'gentile' , alien to all the religions, seeks instruction when he meets three 'wise men' under a grove of trees. The leaves of the trees contain bits of information and this is part of Llull's amazing prototype computer without electricity, but leaving that aside. The three wise men are a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim. Each in turn instructs the 'gentile' in his spiritual way. The three ways are presented with knowledge and fairness, Llull himself is a priest who will be stoned to death in Tunis for his demonstration of the synthesis of religion pointing to Christ so the author's position is on the side but, at the end the Gentile thanks them all profusely saying he has learned from each and says he will wait for friends to tell them about the religion he has chosen. The wise men do not want to hear his choice and go on their way </i>

"In order for each to be free in choosing his religion they prefer not to know which he chose. And all the more so since this is a question we could discuss among ourselves to see if by force reason and by intellect we can surmise your choice, and if you state it then we would not have such a good subject or such satisfaction in discovering the truth. With these words the wise men returned to the city from which they had come...

[having decided]

Let us meet once a day, by the five trees, and have our discussions until the three of us shall have one faith, and can find one way to honor and serve one another for turmoil ill will and shame prevent men from agreeing with one another."

<i>If somewhere under the trees and 'according to the manner the Lady of Intelligence' showed us' the talk continues, it seems it has not reached its end ...or indeed perhaps it has not yet been resumed</i>

(4)

"The essential, only and profoundest theme of the history of the world and of mankind, to which all others are subordinate, is the conflict between skepticism and faith."

Goethe

(5)

<i>On a hill in Athens in the shadow of the Parthenon where the Greek intelligentsia gathered and debated every thought with particular interest in anything newly minted, Paul of Tarsus spoke of God and of Jesus , and at this point the meeting ends as it says, with an incompleteness...</i>

"some mocked; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this.' and some joined and believed, and Paul went out from among them. "

(6)

<i>But is this discussion of faith and skepticism, of Jacob with Esau, of Justin with Trypho, of finally the question of Jesus 'Who do you say that I am?', a discussion which can end within

history...?</i>

Franz Werfel from *Between Heaven and Earth: Theologumena*.

"If Christ is the Truth and Life, then the Jews are the everlasting witness in the flesh, of this Truth. Without this living witness, that wanders through the whole world, Christ would sink down into a mere myth like Apollo or Dionysos.

It is impossible for the Jews to recognize the Messiah (who comes to interpret Israel aright to itself and the world) 'until the time has been fulfilled.' That is actually not until the end of time...until the last day but one of world history.

What would Israel be without the Church? and what would the Church be without Israel?"
Franz Werfel 1944

(7)

At the Last Supper Jesus washes the feet of the disciples

"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." and "Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand."

<i>And that too is a meeting and left incomplete. Waiting to be completed by understanding and realization in history.</i>

(8)

We have assembled these elements and now as if in making a diagram of some inner or spiritual geometry let us draw a line extended from each...

From Jacob and Esau the line of brotherhood which ensures a meeting at the end, whether at Succoth or at Mount Seir and however deferred over however many millenia.

From Justin going to sea with Trypho's blessing, the line of two roles, staying and going. "The Wandering Christian" and within the line the sense of Biblical study as the way capable of reconciliation of the the two ways.

and another line from Raimundlo Lull's three wise men meeting daily under the five trees by the river... The line of the intelligence of kindness and courtesy which cannot fail in the end to resolve the logically irresolvable.

From Goethe the line of realization that only this question matters.

From Athens a line of an incomplete dialectic, rejection, acceptance and deferral.

And from Franz Werfel the line of realization that both the one who goes, in one aspect the "Wandering Christian" in another the "Wandering Jew", and the one who stays, have a reconciliation to make which will be as momentous as the next to last day of history...

And from the washing of the feet the line of serving one another as the ground of shared life.

(9)<i>

As we extend these seven lines we find perhaps that they come together at a prism from which they proceeded that of the prayer of Jesus on the Mount of Olives in John 17:

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"that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one..."

<i>All of these lines we have drawn from the beginning until now are consequence of this prayer which Jesus speaks, but which surely is the desire of the world itself, for the coming together in a unity of knowledge and life, as in the trees of the Eden above and which in Time could only be realized in one who was the fulfilment of the Torah and the prophets.</i>

(10)

As this prayer gathers up all so it is the source of all, it is the prism of our diagram, with its seven rays and if we follow on from this prism working back on the line of undivided light, we are led it may be to a point above Mount Tabor and three figures attesting a Unity...

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AFTERWORD

So these thoughts, of course on a practical level that study and talk and prayer together as Justin and Lull testify, is a way to resolution but that something further is needed, something which already illuminates their accounts...

I have tried to indicate this by what is of course a somewhat fanciful geometrical diagram of the Spirit... itself just an image and yet perhaps saying what I would have to offer on this matter which seems to me indeed of the greatest importance.

<i>

Again it is because of the "something further" that we have felt the appropriateness of this indirect and imagistic approach.

And to speak of incompleteness seems to me not to be a pessimistic thing but rather to leave the future, and even this day, open to completion.</i>

Of course the question of Jesus as fulfilment of Torah and Prophets is immediately and directly a question for those who derive their thought from the Bible, for Christianity and Judaism and, if you will, Islam, and so our sources appropriately have been in the main from this history of discussion...

But we feel that the question expands to the larger one put by Goethe and the whole question of Adam seeking to add knowledge to life, to all discussion whatsoever.

Fr Alexander Men said that "the universe, nature...and providence confront us with the truth" that we must come to agreement or perish.

And surely the central and first question, as this Conference makes its theme, is that of the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.