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ARCHIVES

The Christian Hope and Our Fellow Man

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(Concluded)

II. THE NEW DETACHMENT

John the Baptist at the dawning of the new age, the coming of the Kingdom, called men away from ties of home, nation, Temple, and cultus into the desert, to meet there the God who was with Israel before Israel had a home, a national life, a Temple, and a cultus. The repentance which he preached was a great act of detachment. Likewise Jesus detached His disciples from the traditional standards of clean and unclean, pointed to Himself as greater than the Temple, and promised to build His ἐκκλησία, His people of God, as inheritor of Israel's promise but detached from Israel's standards and Israel's fate. And Jesus put the world's first, daily bread, into fourth place in the prayer which He taught us to pray. Even the hallowed ties of family could not bind if they held a man from Jesus. So radical was the detachment He demanded and gave. (Luke 14:25-35.)

St. Paul speaks of himself as crucified to the world (Gal. 6:14) and of his converts as children of the day in the midst of a world that is still in the night (1 Thess. 5:4 ff.). There runs through the whole New Testament this note of detachment and with it a vast and joyous sigh of relief at having gotten rid of a whole crew of mad and furious masters.

And so it is in James: the word of truth which brought us forth and made us God's men in God's motion has set us free from lies and delusions, has detached us from the compulsion of the standards, values, ties, bonds, and involvements of this world, this aeon. And that with no philosophically passive and anemic detachment but with a joyous, resilient, full-blooded vigor, such as speaks in the vigorous and athletic accent of the admonitions of James.

Let us examine this detachment of hope a little more in detail; for it bears directly on the subject that has brought us together here, that of human relations. The bearing is, in fact, for the most

part so obvious that I shall not particularly underscore it but leave it to you to draw the line from the New Testament to your own situation yourselves.

"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials" (1:2 RSV). Here is a complete inversion of values. We have been set free from *eudaemonism*, from the illusion that man's noblest and most indispensable work is the pursuit of happiness, the illusion that we are somehow entitled to happiness, that we have a right to it. We know of no rights that we can lay claim to at all, least of all a right to happiness; we, the people born of God, know only of *gifts*, and they are all gifts of the Giver-God, who gives absolutely and without reproaching the recipient, gifts of the Father of Lights, who is greater and more constant in His goodness than the lights which He has created and is capable of giving greater things than happiness; from glory to glory advancing, we receive His gifts, and we know that they are good gifts. Whether they square up to some standard of "happiness" constructed by men of this poor dying world or not, that is a largely irrelevant question. "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity that of the New and carrieth the greater benediction" (Bacon).

We have therewith been removed from that prolific mother of strife (4:1 ff.), that teeming womb of wars, the angry distinction between have and have-not; standards of living and *Lebensraum* have ceased to loom up as *the* questions in our lives. The word of truth has freed us from what our Lord Himself has called the "deceit of wealth" (Matt. 13:22). The poor man is rich in faith, inheritor of the Kingdom promised to those that love God (2:5), and exults in his exaltation (1:9), while the rich man is lifted above his wealth, not merely to the level of indifference but to the point where he exults in his "humiliation" (1:10), in the fact that all his greatness is no longer great in his own eyes; he has become a Diasporite over against his own wealth, and he boasts his superiority to the transience of the things of this world, to the death-bound sweep of all things that make for economic greatness.

We have been freed, too, of secularism, from that gray and flat pattern of thought in which this world is both background and foreground, beginning and end. Since the Lord of Glory entered

into time, all time has become God's time, and we cannot dispose of our years and days as if they were ours and not God's — the *condicio Jacobea*, "If the Lord wills," lies over all our planning (4:14, 15). "God-less" planning has become impossible for us; and so has "God-less" speech. That is why we cannot swear; to swear would be to indicate that *for once* the God of Truth is to be exceptionally present to lend sanction to our worldly, that is, our normally God-less and lying, words (5:12). Since He has begotten us again with His word of truth, all words are freighted with eternity, all words are spoken in His presence, all words are oaths.

Since that word of truth has been spoken, this *saeculum*, this world, need not dominate us any more; it is possible to keep oneself unspotted from the God-forsaking world (1:27). It is possible to hear God's voice above the voice of self and world, to hear the new victorious theme amid the dissonances in the cosmic symphony (1:21). Our tongues need be no longer the incarnation of the unrighteous world (3:6), of the adulterous world (4:4); they need no longer be divided between cursing and blessing (3:10).

This spells release from the imprisonment in the present, too, from the obedience to the demands of here and now. The present is no longer barren, to be filled somehow, anyhow; it is a waiting for the harvest (5:7). We must wait, but know before whose doors we wait, why we wait, and what we are waiting for. The wall that separates the present from the future has become translucent. Nor is it so thick a wall that we cannot hear the voice of God beyond it. We have a message (5:10) and a vision which make for patient endurance, for that stamina of the fighter who is certain of his victory, who fights upon a field which God has already marked victoriously as His own.

We are free, too, from the pressure of prestige, our own or others'; we have become, like Paul, capable of counting it dung (Phil. 3:8). Our Lord Jesus, the Lord of Glory, has drawn a fat, black, and never-to-be-erased line between us, His Diaspora, and the shoving, shouldering, and scrambling world: "It *is* not so among you" (Matt. 20:26); for the Son of Man came to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. The way of glory is the

downward way of ministry and self-giving. We receive the Word in meekness, in that confident dependence upon God which credits Him with the ability to read His own calendar and the will to set wrong right in His time and in His way without the self-assertion of our loud and angry mouths (1:21, 26). Wisdom does its work of mercy in meekness (3:13), wisdom is ἐπιεικής — the largeness of its hope makes it large and noble of heart, a princely virtue (3:17). We see men, rich and poor, black, yellow, and white, with God's eyes, not with the eyes of self; fawning on the great and contempt for the shabby and honorless both melt away before the rising sun of the Christian hope (2:1-13). Our boasting ceases; the chest-thumping master of his fate and captain of his soul is heard no more (4:16) — for greatness lies in hope, in submittal wholly and willingly to Him who will exalt us all (4:7-10).

We are, moreover, detached from a by-form of prestige and self-assertion which takes devious and blasphemous ways: self-asserting man cannot and will not face the fact of his own sin, at least not in the specifically uncomfortable form of accountable sin, of guilt. He blinks his guilt by a flight into naturalism or boldly throws it upon God, in fatalism. All that is now past for us; from fatalism and naturalism we are delivered by the Word of Truth, which is our Word of Hope; the Just One bore our guilt (5:6), and in the light of the Cross we can see our sin as our own. We know now, unmistakably and unalterably, that God tempts no man to sin (1:13 ff.); we cannot deceive ourselves when confronted by Him who brought us forth as the first fruits of His creatures. The Father of Lights has made us cease to hate the light which shows us our guilt (cf. John 3:20).

This being in God's motion, which is the essence of the New Testament hope, frees us also from delusive religiosity, from the aberrations of an ingrown piety which believes it can contemplate the arabesques of God's whipping garments as He presses on toward His goal for us as if they were a pattern designed to relieve the plainness of the walls of our sequestered, contemplatory cells, a piety which believes, in other words, that it can hear God's Word without doing it, can receive mercy without showing mercy (1:27; 2:1-13). Hope releases us from the fallacy of verbal veneration;

we who have felt and feel the creative breath of God, the impulsive afflatus of His Spirit, can never again think of Him as a sort of personified First Cause, content to be contemplated.

A hope which knows God as the sole Author of our new Diaspora-being (1:18), as the perpetual and perfect Giver who will finish the good work which He has begun in us, is proof against the charms of moralism also. It cannot think of God's will as fractional or fractionable—His Law is one unbreakable whole, wholly kept or wholly broken (2:9). There can be no thought, for hopers in God, of building ladders part way up to Him by fractional obedience to His Law; especially when hope fulfilled knows that He has already come all the way down to us in the crucified Lord of Glory (2:1; 5:6) and has planted His Spirit in us (4:5), so that His will becomes for us the law of liberty, written in the hearts of sons, the royal law, freely kept by men who are by God's appointment kings (2:5).

All these are but concrete manifestations of the ultimate detachment which lies behind them all—the detachment from the domination of the devil (Col. 1:13). Hope knows that the devil is judged and bound, defeated. Our wisdom need no longer be the wisdom of envy and self-seeking, a devilish wisdom; there is a meek, pure, wisdom which comes to us from above (3:13-18). The tongue need no longer be incandescent with the fires of Gehenna, although no man can tame it (3:8). It has been tamed by the Great Overcomer. Satan has been defeated, and our every resistance to him is the renewed incarnation of this prime defeat. And so James can speak in the succinct and tonic tones of confidence when he tells us: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (4:7). It is as simple as that: *Ein Wörtlein kann ihn fällen!*

We are freed, in short, by hope from that secular arithmetic which mistakes fractions for whole numbers and is built up on the assumption that a fraction of our life is the whole number of our life. We who receive with meekness the Word of God know that our life is a whole number divided into two fractions. We know that the small fraction is critically important and that the character of the whole number depends on what manner of fraction this small fraction is; but we know that it is only a fraction. Hope sets the present at its proper value.

III. THE NEW INVOLVEMENT

We know that this little fraction of our life is of critical importance for the whole; that should guard against any misconception of our detachment; it is no monastic flight from the world, no merely philosophic resignation, nor the inverted hedonism of a Lucretius—*Suave mari magno*. It is a happy, safe, courageous, and resolute recognition of the full dimensions of God's great last act. We are free, detached from the compulsions of this world, in order that we may see what we are and where we are. And both what we are and where we are signifies a new and unheard-of involvement.

What are we? We are God's twelve tribes, His children by a new redemptive birth. Where are we? We are God's Diaspora, His people in an alien world, a world still in rebellion against Him, still in the power of the Evil One (1 John 5:19). God's great act of liberation is at the same time His act of laying claim upon us, His confiscation in royal magnanimity of us His new creatures. Therefore James 1:18, the great indicative of redemption, is followed by 1:19, the great imperative: "Know it, my beloved brethren." To *know* God (and we know Him by what He does) is to acknowledge Him as God, to let Him be God in everything; to know Him in hope is to assert here and now the new world where God is all and all. To be *His* twelve tribes in the Dispersion means being (in every area of our lives) the embodiment and the pledge of His triumph over all that clouds His name and opposes His will, is to be His dissenting opinion to the course of this world, His interim proclamation of what has been in the resurrection of Christ and what shall be at His coming, it means being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). Our feckless and misdirected lives come under the Lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, and from Him receive purpose and direction, so that knowing means *hearing*, and hearing means doing, and doing is worship—the God we know is the God who has acted for us, is acting, and will act; to worship Him in Spirit and in truth is to worship Him in act (1:26, 27).

The God to whose motion we are committed, in whom we hope as His dispersed tribes, is the God who has acted with a round and whole, a perfect and exceptionless love, without respect of persons; His glory, the glory of His grace, has tabernacled among us; His Son, the Effulgence of His glory, made purification for our sins. Faith in Him means a life communion with Him, a communion which can tolerate no respect of persons, no false distinctions between man and man, whatever their alleged basis. Hope, committal to God's new world, involves us here and now, commits us here and now, to God's view of the poor and outcast, the honorless and the submerged, compels us to see men with God's eyes and to deal with men, all men, with God's mercy. It is no accident that James 2:1-13, the section which deals with "respect of persons," rings with the great keywords of the Christian proclamation — James is pointing us to where we are and to what we are: election, inheritance, kingdom of God, promise, mercy, and Judgment. Yes, Judgment; for the God who justifies remains, for James as for Paul, God the Judge. Only mercy, God's mercy, will save us at that Judgment; but whether or not we have committed ourselves to that mercy will be seen concretely in the fact that we have or have not been merciful to our brother man; whether our hope in, and our confession to, that mercy has been dominated and active in our whole life.

For the God of mercy who of His own will brought us forth to be the first fruits of His new creation is not mocked (Gal. 6:7); He yearns *jealously* over the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us (James 4:5). That gift of the Spirit involves us inexorably, for the Spirit is God's good Spirit, the creative and moving force of God's new world, the impulse and the dynamic of the New Jerusalem, now at work in the Diaspora. To receive the Spirit is to live the life of the new world, in hope, in the Diaspora. To continue to live the old life of this world, of the *κόσμος*, is enmity against God, is adulterous desertion of Him (4:4); that is the way of self, of one's own "lust" (what St. Paul calls sowing in the field of the flesh), the way which goes with the inevitability of conception, gestation, and birth to death (1:15). What such a Nay to God's new life and new world, such a non-involvement with the Giver-God, means is shown with terrible

clarity in James' denunciation of the rich (5:1-6). Here are men who have decided to take the cash and let the credit go, nor heed the rolling of the distant drum. They have said Nay to the Spirit of God and Yea to garments, silver, and gold. They have gathered treasures—by trampling on men's heads and by condemning the just—in *the last days* (5:3), heedless of what hour has struck; they have fattened their hearts—on the day of slaughter, the Day of Judgment, that dreadful Day (5:5). The fools! They have settled for a pleasant picnic in the shade and have not eyes to see that the shade is the growing shadow cast by the Stone cut without hands (Daniel 2), already arolling to come down and grind to powder all the greatness of the great in this unrighteous world. That is what it means to say Nay to God's new world; it means destruction, judgment without mercy (2:13). And it does not matter who it is that speaks the Nay, and the size and loudness of the Nay makes no difference either. God's new world is the new, the ultimate, the solely valid reality and involves all men, in grace and judgment, and it involves the whole man.

That is why James is so concerned about our words, our Christian words, our Christian talk. "Be quick to hear and slow to speak" (1:19). Do not crowd into the teaching office, "for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness" (3:1, RSV); we shall all stand before the judgment throne of Christ, even the teachers, just the teachers. James knows from Jesus' words how even the idle word can harden into an adamantine indictment against us (Matt. 12:36). With words, those easy words, we vault into God's judgment throne, to judge our brother, to judge God's Law, which bids us love our brother—"There is one Lawgiver and Judge who can save *and can destroy*. Who are you to judge your neighbor?" (4:12.) Even grumbling against one another, that pleasant family and ecclesiastical sport, loses its innocent neutrality: "Grumble not, brethren, against one another, *that you be not judged*. Behold, the Judge stands at the door" (5:9). The last word is not ours to speak but His. With the shadow of the Judge already falling across our threshold, our Yea and our Nay are oaths enough (5:12). To say more would be to deny the new world, the coming world, where God is normal

in men's lives and not the exception. Nonswearing is the Diaspora's oath of fealty to the great King of the New Jerusalem.

Our Diaspora-lives are therefore lives of holy fear and of mournful penitence; James' cry: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double soul" (4:8), is ever in our ears. "Be afflicted and mourn and weep." But it is no craven, paralyzing fear, and it is no fruitless penitence. The jealous God is at the same time the God who gives the greater grace for the greater need (4:6) to the humble; the God who draws near to us when we in repentance turn to Him (4:8), the God who will exalt those who look to Him for their exaltation (4:10).

This life of repentance is a life of faith (2:14-26). Faith is life-communion with the working God and is (here faith and hope overlap) total committal to His consummation. Therefore faith has works; *it acts on God's future*. The works of Abraham and Rahab are called works of faith; they could with equal appropriateness be called acts of hope: Abraham, detached from the ties of blood by the impulse of his hope, offered up his son in the sure hope that God's promise would not fail, that He is greater than His greatest gift; Rahab, detached from civic ties by the impulse of her hope, acted in the hope, the confidence of faith looking forward, that God would bring to pass what He had promised: "I know that the Lord hath given you the land . . . the Lord, your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9, 11). Their faith is in extreme contrast to the faith of demons; the demons know of God's new world, too: "Art Thou come to destroy us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29); but it is a knowledge without hope, without assent, without involvement. Their faith has no hope and therefore has no works. They see the line drawn through history by God's chariot wheels, but they know that they shall never follow in His train. They shudder and cower, for they know that they shall be downriden by the chariots of God. When they cry, "We know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God," they have a creed, but they are using it magically, as a means of warding off the Holy One of God. It is a thought to make one pause; a creed recited without the involvement of living hope can become a magical, apotropaic formula. We can use creeds to get rid of God, to

confess Him and have done with Him. — But we are God's twelve tribes in the Dispersion and have the signature of His hope upon us; our creeds cannot become apotropaeic formulas; our creeds are confessions to the great act of the living God, done, adoring, and to be done; and so our creeds become deeds, deeds as natural as breathing and as inevitable.

All this is, perhaps, disappointingly general; but it has to be general if we are going to let the New Testament speak to us on the subject of human relations, speak to us, that is, not as *an* authority but as *the* authority. If we are willing to do that, there are two points that emerge with great clarity.

The one is this: For us as Diasporites, as members of the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, *heredity (our birth from God) is everything and environment nothing*. For us, every accepted value of this world is under perpetual and ever-renewed question. The philosophic presuppositions and axioms of any age are under question. We are forced, as men of hope, to put our questions always *in conspectu Dei*, that is, in the sight of the God in motion, the God who has drawn near in grace and mercy, the God drawing nigh to consummate in judgment and renewal what He has begun. In His presence nothing that is of this age is per se a given, acceptable magnitude: the Western tradition, the American way of life, standards of living, human rights, the self-evident truths of this age or any age, everything that lives from man to man — we are Diasporites over against them all. The church and the Christian who have lost their power to question their environment have ceased to be Christian and church. Our study, endeavors, and work in the field of human relations must, in other words, be specifically and peculiarly, New Testamentally Christian if we are to justify their existence.

The second point is a corollary of the first: *If our endeavors in this or any field are to be specifically Christian, they must be eschatological*; that is, they must be done in the tension of expectancy. For only so can we really be guided by the New Testament. The New Testament is, as a codebook of ethics, a great disappointment; it is sparse in making distinctions and lacking in detail; it offers no cleanly and clearly articulated program, appears almost desultory in its selection of examples — for example, it legislates

no rites, sets no times or seasons, prescribes no organization, offers only the most general hints on Christian education. It is something far better and greater: It is an inspired book; that is, the Spirit of God, the Beginning and the Guarantee of the New World of God, is at work in it and through it, as He was its Author; the New Testament translates us, if we will not resist it, into a new situation and therefore has a certain high nonchalance about the spiritually obvious. After all, you needn't tell a mountain climber not to take along a small anvil (handy for cracking nuts along the way) or a skier in mid-career not to look back to take snapshots of where he has been, or a swimmer not to wear long underwear, or a berrypicker not to wear boxing gloves. The detachment and involvement given with our hope "legislate" with the force of the obvious and imminent fact. And so we must also ask ourselves: Dare we consider any phase of Christian life and action noneschatologically, without finding its place in God's last chapter, that chapter which began with the Incarnation and shall end in glory with the return of our Lord? Maranatha!

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