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***ST. PAUL AND  
PROTESTANTISM,  
WITH AN ESSAY  
ON PURITANISM  
AND THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND***

**Matthew Arnold**

# **St. Paul and Protestantism, with an Essay on Puritanism and the Church of England**

EAN 8596547312062

DigiCat, 2022

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# **PREFACE.**

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The essay following the treatise on St. Paul and Protestantism, was meant to clear away offence or misunderstanding which had arisen out of that treatise. There still remain one or two points on which a word of explanation may be useful, and to them this preface is addressed.

The general objection, that the scheme of doctrine criticised by me is common to both Puritanism and the Church of England, and does not characterise the one more essentially than the other, has been removed, I hope, by the concluding essay. But it is said that there is, at any rate, a large party in the Church of England,—the so-called *Evangelical* party,—which holds just the scheme of doctrine I have called Puritan; that this large party, at least, if not the whole Church of England, is as much a stronghold of the distinctive Puritan tenets as the Nonconformists are; and that to tax the Nonconformists with these tenets, and to say nothing about the Evangelical clergy holding them too, is injurious and unfair.

The Evangelical party in the Church of England we must always, certainly, have a disposition to treat with forbearance, inasmuch as this party has so strongly loved what is indeed the most loveable of things,—religion. They have also avoided that unblessed mixture of politics and

religion by which both politics and religion are spoilt. This, however, would not alone have prevented our making them jointly answerable with the Puritans for that body of opinions which calls itself Scriptural Protestantism, but which is, in truth, a perversion of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. But there is this difference between the Evangelical party in the Church of England and the Puritans outside her;—the Evangelicals have not added to the first error of holding this unsound body of opinions, the second error of separating for them. They have thus, as we have already noticed, escaped the mixing of politics and religion, which arises directly and naturally out of this separating for opinions. But they have also done that which we most blame Nonconformity for not doing;—they have left themselves in the way of development. Practically they have admitted that the Christian Church is built, not on the foundation of Lutheran and Calvinist dogmas, but on the foundation: *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*<sup>[1]</sup> Mr. Ryle or the Dean of Ripon may have as erroneous notions as to what *truth* and *the gospel* really is, as Mr. Spurgeon or the President of the Wesleyan Conference; but they do not tie themselves tighter still to these erroneous notions, nor do their best to cut themselves off from outgrowing them, by resolving *to have no fellowship with the man of sin* who holds different notions. On the contrary, they are worshippers in the same Church, professors of the same faith, ministers of the same confraternity, as men who hold that their *Scriptural Protestantism* is all wrong, and who hold other notions of their own quite at variance with it. And thus they do

homage to an ideal of Christianity which is larger, higher, and better than either their notions or those of their opponents, and in respect of which both their notions and those of their opponents are inadequate; and this admission of the relative inadequacy of their notions is itself a stage towards the future admission of their positive inadequacy.

In fact, the popular Protestant theology, which we have criticised as such a grave perversion of the teaching of St. Paul, has not in the so-called Evangelical party of the Church of England its chief centre and stronghold. This party, which, following in the wake of Wesley and others, so felt in a day of general insensibility the power and comfort of the Christian religion, and which did so much to make others feel them, but which also adopted and promulgated a scientific account so inadequate and so misleading of the religion which attracted it,—this great party has done its work, and is now undergoing that law of transformation and development which obtains in a national Church. The power is passing from it to others, who will make good some of the aspects of religion which the Evangelicals neglected, and who will then, in their turn, from the same cause of the scientific inadequacy of their conception of Christianity, change and pass away. The Evangelical clergy no longer recruits itself with success, no longer lays hold on such promising subjects as formerly. It is losing the future and feels that it is losing it. Its signs of a vigorous life, its gaiety and audacity, are confined to its older members, too powerful to lose their own vigour, but without successors to whom to transmit it. It was impossible not to admire the genuine and rich though somewhat brutal humour of the

Dean of Ripon's famous similitude of the two lepers.[2] But from which of the younger members of the Evangelical clergy do such strokes now come? The best of their own younger generation, the soldiers of their own training, are slipping away from them; and he who looks for the source whence popular Puritan theology now derives power and perpetuation, will not fix his eyes on the Evangelical clergy of the Church of England.

Another point where a word of explanation seems desirable is the objection taken on a kind of personal ground to the criticism of St. Paul's doctrine which we have attempted. 'What!' it is said, 'if this view of St. Paul's meaning, so unlike the received view, were the true one, do you suppose it would have been left for you to discover it? Are you wiser than the hundreds of learned people who for generation after generation have been occupying themselves with St. Paul and little else? Has it been left for you to bring in a new religion and found a new church?' Now on this line of expostulation, which, so far as it draws from unworthiness of ours its argument, appears to have, no doubt, great force, there are three remarks to be offered. In the first place, even if the version of St. Paul which we propound were both new and true, yet we do not, on that account, make of it a new religion or set up a new church for its sake. That would be *separating for opinions*, heresy, which is just what we reproach the Nonconformists with. In the seventh century, there arose near the Euphrates a sect called Paulicians, who professed to form themselves on the pure doctrine of St. Paul, which other Christians, they said, had misunderstood and corrupted. And we, I suppose,

having discovered how popular Protestantism perverts St. Paul, are expected to try and make a new sect of Paulicians on the strength of this discovery; such being just the course which our Puritan friends would themselves eagerly take in like case. But the Christian Church is founded, not on a correct speculative knowledge of the ideas of Paul, but on the much surer ground: *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*; and, holding this to be so, we might change the current strain of doctrinal theology from one end to the other, without, on that account, setting up any new church or bringing in any new religion.

In the second place, the version we propound of St. Paul's line of thought is not new, is not of our discovering. It belongs to the 'Zeit-Geist,' or *time-spirit*, it is in the air, and many have long been anticipating it, preparing it, setting forth this and that part of it, till there is not a part, probably, of all we have said, which has not already been said by others before us, and said more learnedly and fully than we can say it. All we have done is to take it as a whole, and give a plain, popular, connected exposition of it; for which, perhaps, our notions about culture, about the many sides to the human spirit, about making these sides help one another instead of remaining enemies and strangers, have been of some advantage. For most of those who read St. Paul diligently are Hebraisers; they regard little except the Hebraising impulse in us and the documents which concern it. They have little notion of letting their consciousness play on things freely, little ear for the voice of the 'Zeit-Geist;' and they are so immersed in an order of thoughts and words which are peculiar, that, in the broad general order of



thoughts and words, which is the life of popular exposition, they are not very much at home.

Thirdly, and in the last place, we by no means put forth our version of St. Paul's line of thought as true, in the same fashion as Puritanism put forth its *Scriptural Protestantism*, or *gospel*, as true. Their truth the Puritans exhibit as a sort of cast-iron product, rigid, definite, and complete, which they have got once for all, and which can no longer have anything added to it or anything withdrawn from it. But of our rendering of St. Paul's thought we conceive rather as of a product of nature, which has grown to be what it is and which will grow more; which will not stand just as we now exhibit it, but which will gain some aspects which we now fail to show in it, and will drop some which we now give it; which will be developed, in short, farther, just in like manner as it has reached its present stage by development.

Thus we present our conceptions, neither as something quite new nor as something quite true; nor yet as any ground, even supposing they were quite new and true, for a separate church or religion. But so far they are, we think, new and true, and a fruit of sound development, a genuine product of the 'Zeit-Geist,' that their mere contact seems to make the old Puritan conceptions look unlikely and indefensible, and begin a sort of re-modelling and refacing of themselves. Let us just see how far this change has practically gone.

The formal and scholastic version of its theology, Calvinist or Arminian, as given by its seventeenth-century fathers, and enshrined in the trust-deeds of so many of its chapels,—of this, at any rate, modern Puritanism is

beginning to feel shy. Take the Calvinist doctrine of election. 'By God's decree a certain number of angels and men are predestinated, out of God's mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works in them, to everlasting life; and others foreordained, according to the unsearchable counsel of his will, whereby he extends or withholds mercy as he pleases, to everlasting death.' In that scientific form, at least, the doctrine of election begins to look dubious to the Calvinistic Puritan, and he puts it a good deal out of sight. Take the Arminian doctrine of justification. 'We could not expect any relief from heaven out of that misery under which we lie, were not God's displeasure against us first pacified and our sins remitted. This is the signal and transcendent benefit of our free justification through the blood of Christ, that God's offence justly conceived against us for our sins (which would have been an eternal bar and restraint to the efflux of his grace upon us) being removed, the divine grace and bounty may freely flow forth upon us.' In that scientific form, the doctrine of justification begins to look less satisfactory to the Arminian Puritan, and he tends to put it out of sight.

The same may be said of the doctrine of election in its plain popular form of statement also. 'I hold,' says Whitefield, in the forcible style which so took his hearers' fancy,—'I hold that a certain number are elected from eternity, and these must and shall be saved, and the rest of mankind must and shall be damned.' A Calvinistic Puritan now-a-days must be either a fervid Welsh Dissenter, or a strenuous Particular Baptist in some remote place in the country, not to be a little staggered at this sort of

expression. As to the doctrine of justification in its current, popular form of statement, the case is somewhat different. 'My own works,' says Wesley, 'my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, so far from making any atonement for the least of those sins which are more in number than the hairs of my head, that the most specious of them need an atonement themselves; that, having the sentence of death in my heart and nothing in or of myself to plead, I have no hope but that of being justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus. The faith I want is a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven and I reconciled to the favour of God. Believe and thou shalt be saved! He that believeth is passed from death to life. Faith is the free gift of God, which he bestows not on those who are worthy of his favour, not on such as are previously holy and so fit to be crowned with all the blessings of his goodness, but on the ungodly and unholy, who till that hour were fit only for everlasting damnation. Look for sanctification just as you are, as a poor sinner that has nothing to pay, nothing to plead but *Christ died.*' Deliverances of this sort, which in Wesley are frequent and in Wesley's followers are unceasing, still, no doubt, pass current everywhere with Puritanism, are expected as of course, and find favour; they are just what Puritans commonly mean by *Scriptural Protestantism, the truth, the gospel-feast.* Nevertheless they no longer quite satisfy; the better minds among Puritans try instinctively to give some fresh turn or development to them; they are no longer, to minds of this order, an unquestionable word and a sure stay; and from this point to

their final transformation the course is certain. The predestinarian and solifidian dogmas, for the very sake of which our Puritan churches came into existence, begin to feel the irresistible breath of the 'Zeit-Geist;' some of them melt quicker, others slower, but all of them are doomed. Under the eyes of this generation Puritan Dissent has to execute an entire change of front, and to present us with a new reason for its existing. What will that new reason be?

There needs no conjuror to tell us. It will be the Rev. Mr. Conder's reason, which we have quoted in our concluding essay. It will be Scriptural Protestantism in *church-order*, rather than Scriptural Protestantism in *church-doctrine*. 'Congregational Nonconformists can never be incorporated into an organic union with Anglican Episcopacy, because there is not even the shadow of an outline of it in the New Testament, and it is our assertion and profound belief that Christ and the Apostles have given us all the laws that are necessary for the constitution and government of the Church.' This makes church-government not a secondary matter of form, growth, and expediency, but a matter of the essence of Christianity and ordained in Scripture. Expressly set forth in Scripture it is not; so it has to be gathered from Scripture by collection, and every one gathers it in his own way. Unity is of no great importance; but that every man should live in a church-order which he judges to be scriptural, is of the greatest importance. This brings us to Mr. Miall's standard-maxim: *The Dissidence of Dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion!* The more freely the sects develop themselves, the better. The Church of England herself is but *the dominant sect*; her pretensions to

bring back the Dissenters within her pale are offensive and ridiculous. What we ought to aim at is perfect equality, and that the other sects should balance her.

On the old, old subject of the want of historic and philosophic sense shown by those who would make church-government a matter of scriptural regulation, I say nothing at present. A Wesleyan minister, the Rev. Mr. Willey, said the other day at Leeds: 'He did not find anything in either the Old or New Testament to the effect that Christian ministers should become State-servants, like soldiers or excisemen.' He might as well have added that he did not find there anything to the effect that they should wear braces! But on this point I am not here going to enlarge. What I am now concerned with is the relation of this new ground of existence, which more and more the Puritan Churches take and will take as they lose their old ground, to the Christian religion. In the speech which Mr. Winterbotham<sup>[3]</sup> made on the Education Bill, a speech which I had the advantage of hearing, there were uncommon facilities supplied for judging of this relation; indeed that able speech presented a striking picture of it.

And what a picture it was, good heavens! The Puritans say they love righteousness, and they are offended with us for rejoicing that the righteousness of which they boast is the righteousness of the earlier Jews of the Old Testament, which consisted mainly in smiting the Lord's enemies and their own under the fifth rib. And we say that the newer and specially Christian sort of righteousness is something different from this; that the Puritans are, and always have been, deficient in the specially Christian sort of

righteousness; that men like St. Francis of Sales, in the Roman Catholic Church, and Bishop Wilson, in the Church of England, show far more of it than any Puritans; and that St. Paul's signal and eternally fruitful growth in righteousness dates just from his breach with the Puritans of his day. Let us revert to Paul's list of fruits of the spirit, on which we have so often insisted in the pages which follow: *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control.*[4] We keep to this particular list for the sake of greater distinctness; but St. Paul has perpetually lists of the kind, all pointing the same way, and all showing what he meant by Christian righteousness, what he found specially in Christ. They may all be concluded in two qualities, the qualities which Jesus Christ told his disciples to learn of him, the qualities in the name of which, as specially Christ's qualities, Paul adjured his converts. 'Learn of me,' said Jesus, '*that I am mild and lowly in heart.*' 'I beseech you,' said Paul, '*by the mildness and gentleness of Christ.*'[5] The word which our Bibles translate by 'gentleness' means more properly 'reasonableness with sweetness,' 'sweet reasonableness.' 'I beseech you by *the mildness and sweet reasonableness of Christ.*' This mildness and sweet reasonableness it was, which, stamped with the individual charm they had in Jesus Christ, came to the world as something new, won its heart and conquered it. Every one had been asserting his ordinary self and was miserable; to forbear to assert one's ordinary self, to place one's happiness in mildness and sweet reasonableness, was a revelation. As men followed this novel route to happiness, a living spring opened beside their way, the spring of charity;

and out of this spring arose those two heavenly visitants, Charis and Irene, *grace* and *peace*, which enraptured the poor wayfarer, and filled him with a joy which brought all the world after him. And still, whenever these visitants appear, as appear for a witness to the vitality of Christianity they daily do, it is from the same spring that they arise; and this spring is opened solely by the mildness and sweet reasonableness which forbears to assert our ordinary self, nay, which even takes pleasure in effacing it.

And now let us turn to Mr. Winterbotham and the Protestant Dissenters. He interprets their very inner mind, he says; that which he declares in their name, they are all feeling, and would declare for themselves if they could. *'There was a spirit of watchful jealousy on the part of the Dissenters, which made them prone to take offence; therefore statesmen should not introduce the Established Church into all the institutions of the country.'* That is positively the whole speech! 'Strife, jealousy, wrath, contentions, backbitings,'<sup>[6]</sup>—we know the catalogue. And the Dissenters are, by their own confession, so full of these, and the very existence of an organisation of Dissent so makes them a necessity, that the State is required to frame its legislation in consideration of them! Was there ever such a confession made? Here are people existing for the sake of a religion of which the essence is mildness and sweet reasonableness, and the forbearing to assert our ordinary self; and they declare themselves so full of the very temper and habits against which that religion is specially levelled, that they require to have even the occasion of forbearing to

assert their ordinary self removed out of their way, because they are quite sure they will never comply with it!

Never was there a more instructive comment on the blessings of separation, which we are so often invited by separatists to admire. Why does not Dissent forbear to assert its ordinary self, and help to win the world to the mildness and sweet reasonableness of Christ, without this vain contest about machinery? Why does not the Church? is the Dissenter's answer. What an answer for a Christian! We are to defer giving up our ordinary self until our neighbour shall have given up his; that is, we are never to give it up at all. But I will answer the question on more mundane grounds. Why are we to be more blamed than the Church for the strife arising out of our rival existences? asks the Dissenter. Because the Church cannot help existing, and you can! Therefore, *contra ecclesiam nemo pacificus*, as Baxter himself said in his better moments. Because the Church is there; because strife, jealousy, and self-assertion are sure to come with breaking off from her; and because strife, jealousy, and self-assertion are the very miseries against which Christianity is firstly levelled;—therefore we say that a Christian is inexcusable in breaking with the Church, except for a departure from the primal ground of her foundation: *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*

The clergyman,—poor soul!—cannot help being the parson of the parish. He is there like the magistrate; he is a national officer with an appointed function. If one or two voluntary performers, dissatisfied with the magisterial system, were to set themselves up in each parish of the



country, called themselves magistrates, drew a certain number of people to their own way of thinking, tried differences and gave sentences among their people in the best fashion they could, why, probably the established magistrate would not much like it, the leading people in the parish would not much like it, and the newcomers would have mortifications and social estrangements to endure. Probably the established magistrate would call them interlopers; probably he would count them amongst his difficulties. On the side of the newcomers 'a spirit of watchful jealousy,' as Mr. Winterbotham says, would thus be created. The public interest would suffer from the ill blood and confusion prevailing. The established magistrate might naturally say that the newcomers brought the strife and disturbance with them. But who would not smile at these lambs answering: 'Away with that wolf the established magistrate, and all ground for jealousy and quarrel between us will disappear!'

And it is a grievance that the clergyman talks of Dissent as one of the spiritual hindrances in his parish, and desires to get rid of it! Why, by Mr. Winterbotham's own showing, the Dissenters live 'in a spirit of watchful jealousy,' and this temper is as much a spiritual hindrance,—nay, in the view of Christianity it is even a more direct spiritual hindrance,—than drunkenness or loose living. Christianity is, first and above all, a temper, a disposition; and a disposition just the opposite to 'a spirit of watchful jealousy.' Once admit a spirit of watchful jealousy, and Christianity has lost its virtue; it is impotent. All the other vices it was meant to keep out may rush in. Where there is jealousy and strife among you, asks