

T. Austin-Sparks:

"The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor.15:45).

A Lost Impact

We are going to be occupied with the meaning of Christ. Before we come immediately into touch with that matter, there are a few preliminary words that I want to say, and they have to do with something of which we are all conscious, a matter which is troubling, I think I can say, the majority of real Christians. It is the matter of the lost impact of Christ, of the Gospel, of Christianity. We are suffering from a handicap, and that handicap is tradition. Christianity has become that - a tradition so largely, something handed down from generation to generation. It has become a theology, a set of doctrines, of statements about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, and many other things, and as such it has passed very largely into the mental realm - a thing to be worked out in thought, a matter of reason. It has also become a great mystical cult. It has passed into the realm of art, and music, so that you can accept Christianity on that basis and be a Christian along that line, and yet that it shall stand completely out of relation to your inner life. Think of all that goes to make up Christianity as it is known today, of the external, the soulish appreciation; and it has no impact. There is the great need, surely, - and this is what we are seeking to come to at this time.

The great need is to get back to the real meaning of Christ, so that a new impact may come upon ourselves, and there shall come a new impact upon the world through us.

The Peril of Specific Teachings

Before I go on to that, let me point out another peril. It is the peril of specific teachings and specific movements. So often, specific teachings, although they may be right, become something in themselves, turn in upon themselves, and before long, run to seed, and have no positive impact. For a time they go on by their own momentum, the enthusiasm of those who are in them. They are carried on, and then they fade, they lose out. Now, the point is this, that everything must be a direct emanation from Christ and a directive to Christ, and not something in itself. It must come out of Him, it must be a living expression of Him, and it must draw back, lead back, to Him. It must be Christ as source, and Christ as goal, Christ Himself. We have to ask ourselves the question - How do we teach this or that? Are we teaching it or talking about it as an 'it', as some thing; or is it always kept immediately and directly related to Him, that this is but an expression of Christ, this is but a part of Him as the whole? When we detach something and begin to talk about it, whatever it might be, and begin to make a teaching around it, it is going to run to seed, it is going to lose impact sooner or later, the thing is going to come to an end; we are simply going to box the compass of truth, and then we shall have difficulty in finding something fresh to say in a living way. No, that will not do. It is Christ and only Christ Who is the power of God to effect the purpose of God, and we must see how everything is but Christ in expression. In a word, we must see the meaning of Christ. So much for this preliminary word as to the need of recovering impact, and the nature of our present limitation and weakness.

Man, the Climax of Creation

Let us come right to this matter for a little while - the meaning of Christ. In the verse which we read, the first half of the statement takes us back to the first chapters of the book of Genesis, to the bringing in of man. God made man, created man, and it is said of that man that he became a living soul. And when that was done it says "there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day". I am not going to discuss any of the old questions about time periods and so on, but in an order and arrangement of this world's history, we are now in the sixth day (a thousand years being as one day), and in this sixth day the supreme thing is the bringing in of a man in this Divine sense, the last Adam, the second Man, the bringing in of Him personally in the Person of Jesus Christ, and the bringing in of Him corporately in the person of His Body, the Church. That lies in the background; and thinking of the original bringing in of man in Genesis 1, how crisis that was in the whole course of Divine activity! What an immense point of arrival that was, how tremendously significant it was! We can say that it was the thing supreme in the Divine thought, and the bringing in of this second Man, firstly Christ Himself and then the Church which is His Body - called definitely and positively the "new man" (Eph. 2:15) - is as climactic as was the bringing in of Adam on that sixth day.

Man in the Divine Scheme of Things**(a) The Answer and Explanation of All Things**

What did the first Adam mean in the whole scheme of things? Firstly, he was the explanation of all, and the answer to the question of the universe. Why the creation of this universe, heaven and earth and all things therein? Why all this Divine activity and labour, this expenditure of power and wisdom? Why this projecting of Divine energy? Go through the whole account fragment by fragment and ask why? The universe waits for an answer; it is full of questions on Day Five. Day by day the question has been growing; every fresh touch of the Divine hand, every fresh exercise of the Divine energy, wisdom and power, is intensifying the question - What is it for? The universe is one big question when it is said, "And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day". When it comes to "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day", the question is answered, the explanation is given - man is here! "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psa. 8:6). So Adam One was the explanation of all things, and the answer to the question of the universe.

So also is the Christ, but infinitely more so. The last Adam, the second Man, is the explanation of all things. John tells us that quite clearly. "All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made" (John 1:3); and Paul says, "All things have been created through him, and unto him" (Col. 1:16). That is the meaning of Christ, to begin with.

But remember there is this one new man, the Church which is His Body of which He is Head. It, in the larger, corporate, spiritual sense, is Christ in expression. It is unnecessary here for me to remind you that the article is very often used in relation to the Church: it is called "the Christ". "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is the Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12 Gr.). One body, many members. That does not rule out His separate personality, but in this Divine thought He has joined Himself to, or constituted by Himself, a Body of many members, which is the answer to the questions of the universe and the explanation of all things; and there are more than hints in the Scriptures that in the end it will be manifested that Christ, the Son, with the sons, in unveiling, is the answer and explanation of all things. "The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19), and in that day of the manifestation of the sons of God the declaration is that the creation itself shall be delivered. Why is this creation always so abortive, getting so far and stopping short, not going through? Why, with all its tremendous potentialities and resources and abilities - why, with all this, does it turn in upon itself to destroy itself, not deliver itself? Why even today when secrets are being unearthed, divulged, when men have reached such a point of knowledge and understanding, why not an emergence into Utopia, instead of a degenerating into barbarism and self-destruction? With everything so wonderful it is all toward more suffering, more evil, more destruction. However far it goes, the creation cannot get through, cannot break away, cannot emerge to be a glorious creation; but here is the definite statement that the creation itself shall be delivered from bondage and from corruption in the hour of the manifestation of the sons of God. What is the answer to the question of the universe? - and there is a big question. Why this universe, why even this part of it, this fragment of it, this world? What is the explanation? Give us the answer! My soul, the answer is here. As in that smaller, limited realm Adam was the answer to, and the explanation of, that first creation, so in a far larger way, Christ is the answer to, and the explanation of, all things.

(b) The Terminal Point Between Purpose and Fulfilment

But that is only the beginning. What did Adam mean in the scheme of things? He was the terminal point between purpose and fulfilment. I hope that is not too difficult. We are let into this by the Word of God, that before ever that Divine hand set to work to constitute this creation, this present world order, there were counsels purposing the eternal purpose. A great Divine thought was worked out, and it was projected, put into operation, and it reached a terminus when man, Adam, was created, because it was unto him and then to be through him for realisation. There are the simple indications in the story that God worked up to man, put things into man. 'I have made you custodian of My purposes and intentions; upon you rests the great responsibility for My purpose'. He was the terminal point at which the purpose arrived, and from which its fulfilment was intended to begin. We know, of course, his tragedy, and how the purpose stopped short with him in realisation, but God has never abandoned His purpose, and immediately Adam broke down, the last Adam was mentioned, intimated, the "Seed".

As with Adam in that limited way, that intended way, so with Christ. He is the terminal point of all Divine counsels and purposes and thoughts and intentions. They are all unto Him. For Adam, we are told, was, after all, but a figure of Him that was to come. (Rom. 5:14). In Christ, all that ever was in the purposes of God found its point of arrival, and blessed be God, through Him and by Him all those Divine purposes are worked out and perfected and realised without any breakdown. The meaning of Christ is that He is the terminal point of all the thoughts of God from eternity to eternity, as to purpose and fulfilment.

In the corporate, we, "chosen in Him," "called according to (the eternal) purpose", are to be instrumental in the working out of the purpose to its final realisation, and, as a centre to the universe, the Church will be the embodiment and representation and expression of all those Divine intentions and purposes, as we are in Christ Jesus.

(c) The Climax of Divine Energies

Again, Adam was the climax of Divine energies. God had worked, and worked steadily, developing, increasing, moving up period by period, day by day - whatever that might mean, there is room for quite a lot in it, it does not matter - He had been progressively putting forth His energies in an evergrowing way, and phase by phase, step by step, there had been added and added increase, measure by measure, enlargement upon enlargement; and man was the climax of those Divine energies. When you come to Day Seven, there is no evening or morning mentioned. It is eternal in principle, the climax of Divine energy.

We are not just thinking about material and temporal things, we are talking about the last Adam, a life-giving Spirit; we are talking about things spiritual and things eternal now. In this far greater realm, which will doubtless involve the lesser - it will involve the material creation, it will involve our very physical bodies at length - but in that which is above all and over all, supreme to all, that is, the spiritual, Christ is the climax of all Divine energies, for in Him God finishes His work and comes to rest. God finds His final satisfaction in His Son, the Lord Jesus, and the fact that He has raised Him and glorified Him - and remember that it is a part of apostolic attestation that God glorified the Son, clothed Him with glory; and what they saw by the Spirit, and what Saul of Tarsus met even in the flesh, was the glorified Son of Man - the fact that He glorified Him was God's way of attesting Him as His complete satisfaction; and the Church is ultimately seen as coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God, which means that God has found His satisfaction, not only in an individual, but in a Body, the one new man, the climax of Divine energies. God is working now. That very word in our New Testament translation - 'work' or 'working' or 'worketh' - is in the original, the word from which we get 'energy'. It is *energeo*: "It is God who worketh (*energizeth*) in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Again Paul says, "Working in us (*energizing* in us) that which is well-pleasing in his sight" (Heb. 13:21). So we might go on. The Divine energies are at work. What for? To bring about the climax in the Body, as it has been brought about in the Head - the climax of glory. So was Adam in his realm; so is Christ in His far more transcendent realm.

(d) The Instrument for Answering the Iniquity of the Universe

Again, Adam was the intended instrument for answering on earth the evil that had broken out in heaven. An evil thing had occurred. One occupying a place of very great influence and glory, the "Covering Cherub," had said, "I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Iniquity was found in him. "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isa. 14:12). "And angels which kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation, he hath kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). An evil conspiracy, an iniquitous thing somewhere in heaven, had broken out, and evidently multitudes of angels were implicated and were cast out of that realm and they turned to the earth; and Adam had this great opportunity and great responsibility of answering that thing, so far as this earth was concerned. It was given to him in faith, in loyalty, to shut the door of this world to that iniquity, to keep it outside. We know he became the open door to it. "As through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin" (Rom. 5:12); the door was opened. We are not speaking now of the issue, we are speaking of what Adam was in the scheme of things. He was intended to be the answer on this earth to that iniquity which had broken out in the universe: he failed.

Ah, but how easy it is to see this in all that we know now about the Lord Jesus. He has shut the door of a new creation so that that iniquity will never get in, so that that death will never have a place." There shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3); there shall be no more sin; "there shall be no more death" (Rev. 21:4). He is a door; but a closed door to that, and an open door only to life. He has answered that iniquity so far as the creation is concerned; He has met the full force of that very same evil power. The devil and all his angels, with all the evil that they bring in their train, all the spiritual evil that surrounds them like an atmosphere, He has felt it, He has registered it, He has known its impact upon Him; He has known conflict even unto a bloody sweat. He has known it, and He has answered it. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might nullify" (that is the word) "the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8); and in Himself it is done. The meaning of Christ, the last Adam, is that He answers the iniquity of this universe, He has answered it by His Cross, and He has answered the instigator of it all; the prince of this world He has cast out (John 12:31).

(e) The Channel of Life to a World Race

Adam was the intended life channel to a world race. We do not know by definite statement, we can only conclude by deduction, what would have happened if they had chosen another tree instead of the one which they did choose. If they had refused the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and had chosen the tree of life, our deduction is, from fairly good intimation, that the tree of life signified, symbolised, Divine life, uncreated life; what, in the New Testament we know as eternal life; for when Adam sinned, the Lord said "...lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). He put that tree out of their way and put them out of the way of that tree. Talking about spiritual principles, (you can forget the symbolism if you like), if Adam had chosen the alternative and repudiated the forbidden, he would undoubtedly have produced after his kind, and have been the door and the channel of life to a world race. On the other side, our other deduction - and it is more of a definite statement this time - is that through him death came upon all, through him, the one man; and through this other One Man - life. "The last Adam" then does really mean that He is the channel of life to a world race. That is the meaning of Christ.

But His Body is a channel also of His life, life to be transmitted from Him. How much we would like to say about that! We are simply indicating things at the moment.

(f) Spiritual Head in Terms of Life

Finally, for the moment, Adam was, in the scheme of things in the Divine thought, the spiritual head of creation and of the race in terms of life through faith and righteousness; head in terms of life. The key to everything with God is life. You begin with life, you end the Bible with life, and the whole history of things is, the battle for life, life and death locked in this terrific conflict. Christ in the higher spiritual realm than the first Adam is God's appointed Head of the creation and of the race in terms of life. It is not official, ecclesiastical, it is life. We must realise that Christ's ascendancy, supremacy, power, ability and all that goes with Headship, is in terms of His prerogative of life. He is the Son, vested with life; He has the right given Him of God to give life to as many as believe. That is why He is Head. You can set up people in office and make Popes of them and they may make great claims, but what does it amount to? When you come up against death, what can they do? But bring in one who has the power of life over death, be he ever so humble on this earth, he is head, he is master, he is lord. You may bring all the greatest physicians that the world knows into the presence of death, and when death takes charge, they are helpless. But supposing you bring in a little, insignificant person who is nobody, with no capabilities whatever in this world, no training, and that one be invested with the power of life over death, he rules out all these others, they are as nothing in his presence, he is lord of the situation.

Christ is Head, not just by appointment, but in terms of life. We may be very insignificant people on this earth, nothing at all to be taken account of by the world, but if only we have Christ in fulness of life we are in a supreme position, we make all the great organisations and institutions as nothing. It is a spiritual thing, the impact of Christ; not tradition, not history, not theology, but the spiritual power of His presence in terms of life through faith and righteousness.

Through Faith and Righteousness

Life through faith - I expect you have fought that battle out. You know as well as I do that the sooner we settle it, the better. Immediately doubt comes in, death comes in. It does not matter how difficult the situation is, and how real and genuine may seem to be the problem, as soon as we give way to doubt we are encompassed by death, and, although the situation may seem to be an utterly impossible one, if only faith can hold, death is kept at bay, there is life through faith.

Let us look at the first Adam in this matter. The whole thing pivoted upon faith. It was through unbelief of God that death came in through the first Adam. We substitute another word for faith, in order to get nearer to it. Suppose we use the word 'loyalty' for, after all, that was the issue - loyalty to God. Loyalty is good faith. Oh, how much of death and limitation and defeat the Church is suffering today because of this disloyalty of its own people, not only to the Lord, but to one another; and the enemy has an immeasurable degree of advantage because of this disloyalty. It may seem to be coming down to a lower level, but I do think that we have to learn very much more of this lesson of mutual loyalty, standing by one another, being true to one another; even though there may be doubts and reasons for questions, nevertheless, being loyal, finding a ground of loyalty. Loyalty is a grand thing. Adam failed in loyalty to God. He listened to the Evil One; he accepted the insinuation about God; he took on the unholy inference that the devil made; he allowed it to get in and gave an assent to it instead of standing true to God, being loyal to God, saying, Well, I do not understand, I cannot explain, but I believe God! Faith and loyalty are really one in essence, and it is the only way of life.

The Bringing in of a Man

The Lord Jesus fought that battle. Note the utter loyalty of Christ to the Father. Yes, there was plenty for the enemy to play with. He was hungry and weak from His long fast, yet He was not going to be disloyal to the Father at the suggestion of the enemy. Yes, He was suffering, and was going to suffer, ostracism, discount and persecution in this world, and it was a hard way of deprivation. That pinnacle-of-the-temple way might have been a quick road to fame and popularity, but at the expense of loyalty to the Father, and He was having none of it. "It is written"; "it is written"; "it is written". And all the way through, it was that, His solid loyalty of faith to the Father, that made Him Head in terms of life. It is a big lesson and a very difficult one. We are probably all in that hard school, but we are learning that it does not do to let in doubt, to cede any ground to the suggestions of the enemy. We know that we are involved in spiritual death immediately we begin to question the Lord. Something comes over our spirits, and we know we are paralysed until we take that ground back again, get that cleared up and recover a position of faith.

Righteousness; for our present purpose, all we will say is that righteousness means bringing everything unto God - His rights. That is where Satan sinned; he sought to draw from God to himself, to get God's worship transferred to him. That is where Adam failed; to take out of God and have it in himself. "Ye shall be..."; "ye shall know" (Gen. 3:1-5). And that is where the Lord Jesus overcame. He held everything for God and unto God; He drew everything to the Father. He attributed everything to the Father. 'The words that I speak'; 'the works that I do', (John 14:10); everything to the Father. He lived worshipping, and thus He became Head over the creation and the race that was to be, in terms of life, for worship is life, and life is because of righteousness. So says Paul.

We must stop there for the time being. Are you beginning to see something of the meaning of Christ? If we can really see the Lord anew, and come back into a more living, utter oneness with Him, there will be a recovery of the lost impact, there will be a living testimony - not just teaching and not just a movement - there will be the impact of Christ Himself. May the Lord accomplish it soon!