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## PAUL AND THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

BY REVEREND W. W. EVERTS, D.D.

QUITE a literature has appeared in the last twenty years dealing with "Paul and the Mystery Religions." Kurt Deissner *Religionsgeschichtliche Parallelen* (1921) starts with Cumont (*Les Religions orientales*, 2nd ed., 1909) who dealt with the cult of Mithras, as Dietrich does also (*Eine Mithrasliturgie*, 2nd ed., 1910). Reitzenstein (*Die Hellenistischen Mysterien Religionen*, 1910) and Werdland (*Die Hellenistisch-roemische Kultur*, 1907) suggested that the New Testament borrowed from these mystery religions. Bousset (*Kurios Christos*, 1913) compares Paul to the Overman of the Mystics. W. Wredel (*Paulus*, 1904) denies that the Jesus of history was in Paul's mind. J. Weiss (*Das Urchristenthum*, 1914) traces the idea of crucifixion with Christ to the mysteries. W. Heitmüller (*Taufe bei Paulus*, 1903) finds the meaning of the phrase "in Christ" in the deification of the mystic. Kalthoff (*Die Entstehung des Christenthums*, 1904) and Kautsky (*Der Ursprung des Christenthums*, 1910) go so far as to deny that Jesus is the founder of Christianity. Dean Inge in his *Outspoken Essays* says that Paul was steeped in the Greek mysteries. F. Boll derives the ideas of the Apocalypse from the same source. Gankel (*Zum Religionsgeschichtlichen Verständniss des N. T.*) seeks for types of the teaching of Paul in Babylon.

What is there in the mystery religions to account for this the latest attack on the originality of the New Testament? It all turns on the presence of a few Christian terms like "providence" and "perfect" in the cults of Hermes, Mithras, and Orpheus. It is not considered by these writers that these words have different meanings, roots and contexts in the mythologies from those in the New Testament. They do not inquire whether these cults flourished where the New Testament was written or when it was written. We know the founders of Christianity; but Mithras, Orpheus and Hermes are not historical beings but mythological inventions. Paul had

visions and ecstasies, but his glory was that his strength was perfected in weakness.

As a matter of fact, the mysteries did influence Gnosticism, and through the Gnostics the Roman Catholic Church. But as Carl Clemens says (*The Influence of the Mystery Religions*, p. 81) quoting Heinrici: "In general the primitive church could be called an anti-mystery religion." Anrich (*Das Antike Mysterien Wesen*, p. 235) affirms that "a conscious adoption of forms and institutions of the mystery religions can scarcely have taken place."

De Jong (*Das Antike Mysterien-wesen*, p. 60) comes to the same conclusion. "A conscious borrowing is improbable because Mithras and Christianity drew their best forces from different spheres. The gospel spread in Provinces where Mithras did not root." Robertson (*Pagan Christs*, p. 306) is criticized by Clemen (*ut supra*, p. 15) for suggesting that the resurrection is taught in Mithras. He adds (p. 61) that Paul remained untouched by the mystery religions. Heinrici (*Hermes—Mystik und das N. T.*, pp. 16 and 103) affirms that "the spirit that animates Hermes is at such a distance from the N. T. conception that no one can think of filiation or common origin." He quotes (p. 148) Tertullian as calling the Mithras cult a diabolical product. "The mysteries of Hermes," he says (p. 213) cannot be considered a source of N. T. doctrines which are original and transcendent." But after all that has been said the answer to the question whether Paul borrowed from the mystery religions is determined by the date of these mythological writings. Hastings (*Dictionary of Religion*, article "Hermes") says "we are not in the first or second but in the third or fourth century. Lactantius is the first writer who knew the books of Hermes."

Harnack (*Die Terminologie der Wiedergeburt*, p. 140) asserts that "there is no proof that any mystery cult had any influence on Christianity at least until the end of the second century." Cumont says (*ut supra*, X) "the Mithras mysteries had no influence on primitive Christianity because they were insignificant at that time."

Clemen (*ut supra*, p. 13) finds that the oldest monument of Mithras dates from the reign of the Flavian emperors. He says (p. 4) it is scientific nonsense to assume that all the mysteries were everywhere present in the first century (10). The spread of the mystery religions began in the second century. They were not there before if not reported there later (p. 11). He criticizes Heitmüller and Robertson for saying that there was a Mithras cult in Tarsus in the days of Paul and he quotes Cumont as saying we do not know when that cult reached Tarsus. Harnack (*Mission des Christenthums*, II, 271) sets forth that in the East where Christianity appeared Mithras does not appear.

Dobschütz (*Heinrici, ut supra*, p. 214) declares that the general spread of the mysteries of Hermes before 150 A. D. is questionable to him.