

IN REPLY TO A CRITIC.¹

BY THE EDITOR.

IN criticizing my little book *The Pleroma*, Dr. Benjamin Wisner Bacon, Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation in Yale University, speaks of my "superficiality and inaccuracy," and to prove his contention picks out four sentences, designating them "as egregious misstatements of facts and unwarranted inferences." The first quotation (made from the footnote on page 44) is this:

"Justin Martyr wrote a book *on Simon Magus* entitled *Syntagma*."

What we know of Simon Magus is based first upon the Acts of the Apostles viii. 9-10; then upon passages in the Church Fathers, mainly Origen and Justin Martyr. The latter mentions Simon Magus *passim* in several of his extant writings but he gave the most complete account of him in a book entitled the *Syntagma*, which is now lost. This is a fact which has never been questioned, and it is attested by Hegesippus, Irenaeus, Tertullian, pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius and Philastrius, who in their references to Simon Magus and the Simonians have preserved in extracts much of the contents of this book. It is therefore no mere hypothesis to assume that the bulk of the book was devoted to this arch heretic.

The italics "*on Simon Magus*" in the quoted sentence are not mine. They were made by Professor Bacon and are misleading because they give the impression that I had thought the *Syntagma* was entitled "*On Simon Magus*," or at least that it treated of him alone, not of his sect nor any kindred heretics. I cannot believe that Professor Bacon questions Justin Martyr's authorship of the *Syntagma*, but if he means to say that the book treated, not only of Simon Magus, but also of the Simonians and kindred heretics he is quibbling.

The second quotation (taken from page 45) reads thus:

¹ The review to which this article refers appeared in the *Yale Divinity Quarterly*, Vol. VI, No. 4, pp. 131-132.

"The *genuineness* of his (Philo's) reports (in the *De Vita Contemplativa*) has been questioned by Eusebius."

Here I gladly own that Professor Bacon put his finger on a passage which is somehow twisted. I acknowledge my mistake and do so gladly, because it affords me an opportunity to prove to my critic that I am grateful for corrections. I do not mind criticism, but I do resent the spirit in which he administers his censures.

In reading the passage over I find that there is something wrong with it. I have discussed the same problem in *Monist*, VIII, 510, where the facts have been stated correctly, although Eusebius is not mentioned. In the present case the word Therapeuts² is misspelled and "authority" should read "authorship." It appears that a few words have fallen out which has twisted the sense. What I intended to write is really this:

"In his *De vita contemplativa*, Philo tells us of the Therapeuts in Egypt who led a life of holiness, religious contemplation and divine worship, anticipating so much that is commonly regarded as Christian, that the date and authorship of the book have been questioned by Graetz, Lucius and others. Eusebius discusses Philo's report at length (*Eccl. Hist.*, II, 17) and comes to the conclusion that the Therapeuts must have been Christians. His view, however, rests upon a weak foundation, etc."

I am quite dumfounded that Professor Bacon can find any objection to the third sentence, which he quotes from page 45:

"We have still the Scriptural evidence that Christianity has developed from the Zabian movement."

What possible fault can be found in this statement is inconceivable to me. The average public may not know that the Zabians³ are called by the Greek writers and in the New Testament "baptizers," and the leader of the Zabians in Palestine was John the Baptist. I have explained the name Zabian on page 35, and I have used it in preference to the Greek name *baptistes*⁴ for good reasons. This is no mere whim of mine but I follow in this the well-established authority of the good old orthodox professor Neander. What, then, can Professor Bacon's objection be? Would he really deny that the Christianity of Jesus himself, and of the congregation at Jerusalem, developed from the Baptizers or Zabians, and do we not have scrip-

² The common transcription of the name "Therapeutae, *fem.* Therapeutides," is so awkward that I prefer to anglicize the name. The form "Therapeuts" commends itself for the same reason that "Heraclids" is better than "Heraclidæ."

³ From זבאי. *tsaba'*, the Z is to be pronounced *ts* as *z* in German.

⁴ βαπτιστής.

tural evidence that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, i. e., the Baptizer or Zabian?

The fourth and last quotation, culled from page 46, reads thus:

"It is absolutely excluded that Nazarenes can mean men born in Nazareth."

Please consider the context of this sentence. Since we know that early Christians were called Nazarenes and that the Apostle Paul, who was born in Tarsus, is called in Acts xxiv. 5 "a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes," the name Nazarene designates the *sect* from which Christianity sprang and can not mean men of Nazareth. Does Professor Bacon intimate that Paul as well as all the Nazarenes in Jerusalem were natives of Nazareth?⁵ Of course I do not mean to deny that the word can be wrongly used to mean anything.

There are some further comments in Professor Bacon's review which are unfair. He speaks of "misprints which occur with almost every line of Greek quotation." The truth is that there are three typographical mistakes in the whole book, and they are so slight that they can not mislead any one who is familiar with the elements of Greek. They are (p. 29) ἀρχηγὸς for ἀρχηγός; τελειωθεῖς ἀγέετο for τελειωθεῖς ἐγένετο; and on page 38, ὄφισ for ὄφισ. There are two other words in which the spacing is poor.⁶ If in the whole book there are any further mistakes, Professor Bacon should be kind enough to point them out.

Considering the trivial character of the Greek misprints we feel justified in saying that Professor Bacon makes a mountain of a molehill, and his statement that "misprints occur with almost every line of Greek quotations" insinuates that the Greek quotations are unreliable and that the author does not know Greek. Since Professor Bacon must know enough Greek to see that all other Greek quotations are correct and assuming that he is not guilty of intentional exaggeration, there seems to be something wrong with his arithmetic.

Another statement which produces on the reader a wrong impression of the book is the following sentence:

"Dr. Carus puts in striking and popular form much that might escape the general reader in Gunkel, Pfeleiderer, Cumont, Dieterich,⁷ Rohde, Friedlander and Reitzenstein."

⁵ I have discussed the subject of Nazarenes, Nazirs and Nazareth in a small pamphlet entitled *The Age of Christ*, pp. 8-17.

⁶ On page 44 there ought to be a space before ἡ and on page 39 there ought to be no space in ἀγαθοδαίμων.

⁷ I would naturally pass over in silence this misprint of an additional *er*, but it strikes me that one who so severely criticizes a few wrong accents in Greek quotations ought to be a better proofreader himself.

Professor Bacon gives me too much credit here for breadth of reading. Of this list I have utilized in my theological labors only Gunkel and Cumont. Professor Pfeleiderer was a personal friend of mine. I have his books and am generally familiar with his views, but on some essential points it is not probable that he would have accepted my conclusions. The other authors have not found a place in my library.

I will make only one further statement. Professor Bacon characterizes me thus:

"He is deeply interested in the results of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule and promptly convinced that everything in Christianity has been explained by the data of comparative religion."

I will say that the authorities on which I rely in my own investigations are mostly the old and well-established orthodox standard works, and I fall back on what Professor Bacon calls *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* mainly where new data are to be considered, such as the lessons of Babylonian excavations, of Mithraistic documents, and other comparatively recent studies of the religions of Further Asia which were unknown in former days. I consider it even a shortcoming of mine that in certain lines I neglect the younger generation. I state most positively that my views are not taken from them, nor do I anticipate that they have anywhere set forth the same views. But that I should be "promptly convinced that everything in Christianity can be explained by the data of comparative religion" is an assumption for which Professor Bacon has no warrant. He simply imagines that this ought to be the position of a heretic such as he seems to consider me. I believe that Christianity as well as any other religion can be explained only from a philosophical and psychological point of view. The historical data are of great importance, yea they are indispensable for a comprehension of the historical development of Christianity, but no historian will have a sound judgment, unless he is well grounded in philosophy, and in its main branch, psychology, the latter in the widest sense of the word, including the psychology of historic movements. Without a general scientific education every attempt at explaining religion and the phenomena of religious belief will be futile.

I would have ignored Professor Bacon's criticism did he not enunciate his verdicts with so much assurance and in so high-handed a manner, and were he not "Professor of New Testament criticism and interpretation," which lends authority to his contentions.

I have so far limited my comments on Professor Bacon's criticisms to replies to his remarks, but I ought to refer to his own book

on *The Founding of the Church*, which supplies me with enough illustrative matter to explain the psychology of his attitude toward my own views.

This book has been reviewed in most glowing terms in the *Yale Divinity Quarterly* by Prof. A. C. McGiffert, and as an antidote to my own remarks I will quote from it this passage: "He has set forth the primitive Christian situation in a most clarifying fashion. The importance of his labors in the New Testament field is recognized on both sides of the Atlantic, and, in discussing such a subject as the founding of the Church he speaks with an authority born of long and familiar acquaintance."

The *Yale Divinity Quarterly* is "published by the students of the Divinity School of Yale University," and to the editors Professor Bacon, being a member of the faculty, is naturally a welcome contributor and great authority. We gladly believe that Professor Bacon's views are recognized on both sides of the Atlantic, but the praise on the other side is not quite so universally unqualified as Professor McGiffert says, as is borne out by some reviews in English periodicals which have happened to come to our notice.

Professor McGiffert grants that many matters are still in controversy, and so he declares it "impossible to enter upon a discussion of disputed points" with his colleague, but he characterizes the book in a number of quotations from which I copy the following: "Thus the exemplification in Jesus's life and teaching of the principle of self-denying service, followed by the manifestation of Him as the Son of God with power. . . . supplied a complete gospel, a perfect revelation of human duty and destiny. It was in the assured possession of that common twofold gospel, the gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus, that Paul could write: 'There is one body, and one Spirit,' etc. (p. 62).—"Peter was the founder of the Church, as Jesus was the founder of the Kingdom of God. The humbler the originator, the more sure we are that his work was just what it has always purported to be; the awakening, the reincarnation, of the spirit of Jesus. If anything has been made clear by our study, it is that nothing went to the building of the Church which was not placed there in loyal perpetuation of the teaching and example of Jesus. Its faith, its principle of order, its institutions, its work, were all from him. Even its leaders and its members were his old-time companions and fellow-workers in the gathering of the lost sheep. What else could they do? Other foundation could no man lay than that was laid, which was Christ Jesus" (p. 86).

I do not blame Professor Bacon for taking another view of the

problem; but I believe it is the duty of every scholar to treat with charity those who approach a problem from a different standpoint. This charity is lacking in Professor Bacon, and where he ought to see the results of a different viewpoint he reproaches me with superficiality and inaccuracy. I find many details in Professor Bacon's book for which I could take him to task as he has done me.

I hope that an impartial reader will find in my little book *The Pleroma* a refutation of his one-sided view, and perhaps I ought not to blame Professor Bacon for the irritated tone of his criticism. I will quote from his book one more passage which, as Professor McGiffert rightly says, clearly states the author's opinion. Professor Bacon says:

"But there is one definite critical moment which marks the founding of the Church, if by that we mean the emergence of the Christian brotherhood into a consciousness of its separate existence and mission to the world. It is the 'turning again' of Simon Peter. Down to the moment when the risen Lord appeared to Cephas, the cause of Jesus never rose before the world as its day-star. Even as Israel's, it had set in utter darkness. Not a follower remained. There was nothing whatever to justify the hope that Jesus' words would not pass away as scribe and priest were convinced they would—nothing but the prayer: 'Simon, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. And when thou art turned again, stablish thy brethren.' The rock foundation of the Church was the faith of Simon Peter" (p. 23).

To characterize the difference in our views I will quote only one paragraph from *The Pleroma* (p. 126):

"There is a joke told by Austrians on a Magyar who is said to have traveled to the source of the Danube, where he stopped the water so that for a little while it would not flow, and with a mischievous twinkle in his eye he exclaimed: "What a surprise it will be to the people in Vienna when the Danube suddenly runs dry!" This view of the origin of rivers is not unlike the current interpretation of the history of Christianity which is supposed to have received all its momentum either from the Sermon on the Mount or the death of Jesus on the cross,"—or, I may add, "the faith of Simon Peter."

Christianity is like a great stream which gathers tributaries from many quarters. It focuses the essential ideas of pre-Christian religions into a new and higher unity and so I see in Christianity the *pleroma* or fulfilment of the times. It is the result of the sum total of historical conditions according to the cosmic law, the Logos,

which dominates the religious development, not of the Jews alone, but of mankind.

Professor Bacon makes a one horse shay of this great movement in saying that if Simon Peter had not "turned again," or if thereupon he had not "stablished the brethren," there would be no Christianity to-day. If we would only stop the source of the Mississippi the harbor in New Orleans would dry up.

Professor Bacon's ultimate test of historical truth is his conception of Jesus as "the champion of the plain men" whose sane mind is reflected in the Sermon on the Mount. We see a pre-Christian Christ conception originate and develop according to the views of successive ages, and the biographical data of Jesus are more and more made to correspond to this ideal.

Jesus has become a superpersonality⁸ in the history of the Christian church and as such he is a presence in the minds of the people possessing a decided educational influence. Superpersonalities may be powers of nature personified by mythology as gods or by the legend lore of a nation as heroes, as was Heracles for instance in ancient Greece, Osiris in Egypt, Tammuz in Syria, etc., and the supreme superpersonality of the Christian church is Jesus Christ. It is not necessary for a superpersonality to be founded upon an historical character, but they often are, and it is not infrequent that historical personages change at death into superpersonalities.

For the sake of solving the Christ problem of Christian theology it is most essential for us to understand the nature of superpersonality, and we must remember that Jesus the man is less important in the efficiency of this ideal than Christ as a living presence of a superpersonal nature.

The main mistake of theologians in approaching the Christ problem consists in their lack of appreciation of Christ as a superpersonality. It gives rise on the one hand to the fear of losing Christ if the historical Jesus be lost, and it hampers both the orthodox and liberal camps in judging of the spiritual needs of Christian believers as well as the actual part played by Christ in satisfying this need in both the life of individuals and the history of the world.

I have only to add that if Professor Bacon wishes to make a reply, the columns of *The Open Court* shall be open to him. I assure him that I shall be grateful for every error he will point out in my writings and he need not suppress even his reflections.

⁸ In explanation of the meaning of this expression we refer our readers to an article "Person and Personality" in the July *Monist* in which the nature of superpersonality has been discussed on pp. 389 ff.