

The Teaching of
Mr. AUSTIN-SPARK'S Book,

The
Centrality & Unibersality
of the Cross

Examined in the Light of Scripture



by

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The Teaching of Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARK'S Book,

“The Centrality and Universality of the Cross,”

Examined in the light of Scripture

With the greatest care this book has been examined three times. Each time it has left a confused feeling in the mind as to what the author had before him in writing it. The simplicity of the language of the Scriptures stands in striking contrast to the ambiguous phraseology that marks this book. It reminds us of the old Christian woman, who had been reading a Commentary on the Bible. Putting it down with a sigh of relief, she exclaimed, “Thank God for the Bible, it makes the Commentaries plain.”

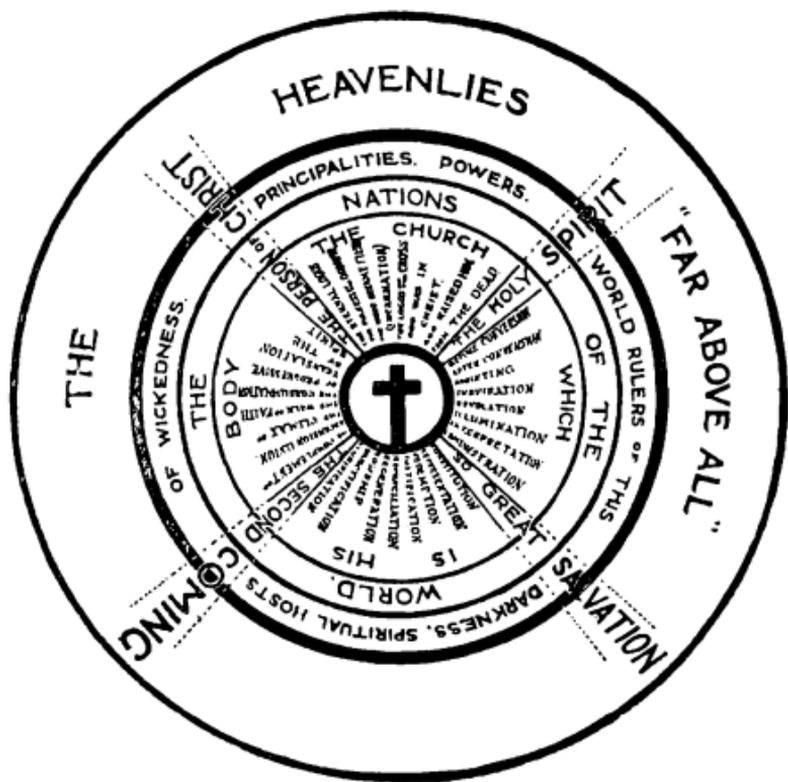
Opposite the title page of Mr. Austin-Sparks' book is a diagram. In it appears an outer circle and three inner circles. It is the innermost circle that demands our special attention. It is designated—**“THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY.”** This diagram Mr. Austin-Sparks describes as:—

“A wheel with all its spokes and its rim, its wheel and its wheel within wheels, but the hub of everything is the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It is not one of the spokes—it is not one of the teaching—but it gathers up in itself everything and it makes possible everything.” (P. 10).

On the next page he tells us that:—

“The Cross is not a phase of truth, but it is now the centre or hub of all truth—the basis, the issue and the explanation of everything.” (P. 11).

In the centre of this circle or wheel, is inscribed a cross, thus



OF WICKEDNESS, SPIRITUAL HOSTS COMING
 OF WICKEDNESS. OF THE GREAT
 CHRIST NATIONS THE CHURCH THE HOLY
 THE BODY THE SECOND
 WORLD IS GREAT OF THE



HEAVENLIES

"FAR ABOVE ALL"

THE

OF WICKEDNESS.

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WORLD IS GREAT



These four “spokes” moving out from the hub and ever coming back to it are:

- I THE PERSON OF CHRIST
- II THE HOLY SPIRIT
- III THE SO-GREAT SALVATION
- IV THE COMING AGAIN OF THE LORD (P. 11).”

One can readily understand how God’s so-great salvation emanates from the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was there our Lord made propitiation for sin, so that salvation might be **righteously** offered to sinful men. We can equally understand that our Lord’s Second Coming is the outcome of His First Coming and that the Cross of our Lord has made it possible, but to make the Person of Christ and the Holy Spirit “spokes” of a wheel, the centre of which is the Cross, is simply astounding and, if carried to its logical extreme, we fear, **blasphemous**. In one sense you cannot over-emphasise the meaning and importance of the Cross, but in another sense you can—that is, if you

emphasise the meaning of the Cross in such a way as to detract from the full meaning and importance of other truths of Scripture, or in any way to disturb the harmony of the revelation of God in Christ. This diagram might easily give the reader the idea that the Person of Christ and the Holy Spirit are subservient to the Cross.

Surely in Scripture, in spite of what Mr. Austin-Sparks says, the Cross is a phase of the truth and a vital and most important phase, but he has the audacity to tell us that it is **not** a phase of the truth. This is most manifestly untrue and an evil thing to say. The Bible is full of the meaning and truth of the Cross, as the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, indeed the whole of the Scriptures, bear abundant testimony.

Under the heading, "CHRIST, A COMPREHENSIVE SPIRITUAL SYSTEM," we read some strange remarks made by Mr. Austin-Sparks. He says:—

“Christ is a vast and comprehensive spiritual system and order. That does not mean that He is not a person, an individual, but He is something more than that.” (P. 35).

Can our Lord be more than what He is? In Him we read that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily (Col. 2, 9). Can we have more than that? Impossible! We read again:—

“Christ is a universe, a universe of spiritual laws, of spiritual principles, of spiritual forces.” (P. 36).

This is getting near to Pantheism. That pagan philosophy teaches that the material universe is God, that God is immanent in nature, that the clothes we wear, our very bodies, the table from which we eat, all is God, mixing up the thought of the Creator and of that which He created. Here we have Christ presented as a universe of spiritual laws, principles and forces. Mr. Austin-Sparks allows that Christ is a Person, but he likewise

makes the assertion that "Christ is a vast unity, a marvellous harmony." (P. 36). Where do we get Scripture teaching this? And yet this Christ, described as "this vast spiritual universe," is put in the diagram as a "spoke" among other spokes in the wheel of which the Cross is the centre. If this is not topsy-turveydom, we don't know what is.

Under the caption, "SEEING THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST BY THE HOLY SPIRIT," we read:—

"What do we know of Christ after all? If we know Him as our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Lord, our High Priest, our Advocate on high, in all these ways, what do we know of Him after all? That is nothing We know nothing. (P. 39).

Mr. Austin-Sparks then quotes the Apostle Paul as his authority for this statement, but where do we read of the

Apostle putting forth anything like this, belittling the wonderful knowledge the humblest believer has of our Lord as Saviour, High Priest and Advocate? Such writing is scandalous. Paul tells us that Christ is the Head of everyman (I Cor. 11. 3), the Head of the Church, His body (Eph. 5. 23), the Head of all principality and power (Col. 2. 10), but he never confuses the Person of our Lord with what is true of Him in the ways we have just mentioned. There is no trace of spiritual Pantheism in his writings. He carefully maintains the personality of our Lord as distinct from all that He becomes and does.

Under the heading—"IN CHRIST A NEW HUMANITY"—we read what Mr. Austin-Sparks says of the sacred humanity of our Lord:—

“His humanity was but a probationary one.” (P. 20).

It does not look like it being probationary when we read of the angelic message to

our Lord's disciples when He ascended to glory. We read:—

“This SAME Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1. 11).

This Scripture awaits fulfilment. We wait for this SAME Jesus.

It does not look like it when the Apostle John tells us what he saw in vision in heaven:—

“And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood **a Lamb, as it had been slain.**” (Rev. 5. 6).

Furthermore, God and **the Lamb** are the Temple of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. God and **the Lamb** are the Light of it (Rev. 22. 22. 23). Finally, the Church is described as **the Lamb's** wife, this last showing that the

Lord's humanity is not probationary and is never laid aside.

Writing of our Lord, Mr. Austin-Sparks says:—

“Inasmuch as the animating principle of His physical being was blood, He was subject to tiredness, hunger and thirst, and therefore capable of dying and seeing corruption. That He did die, but did **not** see corruption was due to the sovereign intervention of God and was due to the moral perfection—or holiness—of His nature.” (P. 20. 21).

This is a most serious statement indeed. It strikes a most grievous blow at the very Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, a shattering blow at the very foundation of the Christian faith. One can only trace the trail of the serpent in it. The Scripture referred to by Mr. Austin-Sparks is Psalm 16.10:—

“Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell [Hades], neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

The Apostle Peter, in his great sermon on The Day of Pentecost, referred to this Psalm (Acts 2.25-31), showing clearly that though David wrote this Psalm, he was not writing of himself, for he died and did see corruption, but, being a prophet, he foretold the triumph of our Lord's resurrection.

Our Lord did die, a glorious sacrificial death, and that **because death had no claim whatsoever on Him.** Our Lord plainly affirmed this. We read:—

“Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. **NO MAN TAKETH IT FROM ME,** but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again.” (John 10. 17-18).

This Scripture disposes entirely of the remark of Mr. Austin-Sparks' that the Lord's not seeing corruption was due "to the sovereign intervention of God, and was due to the moral perfection—or holiness—of His nature."

No man took our Lord's life. Men, **in intention**, did so and are therefore charged with His murder (Acts 7.52). He laid down His life voluntarily, having completed the work of atonement. We read:—

“—When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, “IT IS FINISHED,” and He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.” (John 19.30), that is to say, He dismissed His own spirit, commending it to His Father. Mr. Austin-Sparks tells us our Lord was capable of seeing corruption and that the sovereign intervention of God prevented this. This statement strikes a blow at the sinless Person of the Son of God, and destroys therefore the very

fundamentals of the Christian faith. If our Lord had seen corruption it would have meant His holy body remaining **in death**. And what would that have meant? **Death is the wages of sin.** (Rom. 6.23). If our Lord was capable of seeing corruption it would have meant that He was sinful, and His death not an atoning death, but of necessity as is the common lot of sinful man.

Ten thousand thanks to God that this was not so. Our Lord had power to take to Himself the life He laid down in devotedness to God's will. The Father confirmed this, for He was raised by the glory of the Father (Rom. 6.4), full proof of the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice on the Cross. Hence the triumph of the Resurrection. We shrink from such unguarded statements such as we have been considering, and pray that the author, who makes them, may withdraw them in full confession of his sin.

Under the heading, "CHRIST, A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM," we read:—

“In this universe of Christ our very life, our very coming to the great goal for which we are destined by God, depends upon our response to the laws of Christ, our reaction to the influence of Christ, and upon our knowledge of these things—because in this realm it is God’s will that we should understand these things, we should have understanding in Christ, we should be intelligent.” (P. 38).

This is a very serious statement indeed. If taken seriously it dethrones the grace of God and makes man his own Saviour. Final salvation, according to Mr. Austin-Sparks, depends on our attaining the goal. If these words were true how many of us would reach the goal? We wonder if Mr. Austin-Sparks himself would reach it. Simple believers on the Lord can make neither head nor tail of such a statement. Paul’s statements they can understand, though the most mature saint cannot reach the

depths of meaning contained in them.
We read:—

“So might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 5.21).

“The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6.23).

Not **our** attainment, but **God's grace** is the believer's only hope. Not **our** attainment, but the reception of the gift of God is the way of eternal blessing. Abraham's standing before God was not in his own righteousness, but in **imputed** righteousness, the righteousness of God, which is upon all them that believe. (Rom. 3.22). It has been well said that the best robe, which was put upon the prodigal (Luke 15.22), symbolic of what we have been speaking, was ready in the Father's house before ever the prodigal got there. He did not put a single stitch

to it, as it enveloped him in its fold, thus giving him entrance in suitability for the Father's house. All this, Mr. Austin-Sparks' statement contradicts.

Lastly, we draw attention to a strange statement made by Mr. Austin-Sparks under the heading, "THE LORD'S COMING IS ROOTED IN THE CROSS." We read the following with amazement:

"Let there be differences of opinion as to the willy-nilly translation of Christians, or as to whether the whole church will be caught up at Christ's coming, it is not necessary to formulate theories or teachings on such matters. Selectiveness of rapture may or may not be held, but from one thing no one can get away, God has left no room for theories here—a spiritual state of separation, occupation and expectation is invariably bound up with our being received by Him at His appearing. Why argue otherwise and support a

presuming upon the grace of God? Why take risks on a false idea of Grace when God has given us nothing but a positive demand, saying nothing whatever about His having a place for those who are less than one-hundred-per-cent going on with Him.?" (P. 81).

One notices again and again in his book Mr. Austin-Sparks makes sweeping assertions with little or no exposition of Scripture in support of what he states so dogmatically. This extract is a clear example of this. He begins by denouncing theories and teachings as to the Lord's coming, followed by the statement that there is no room for theories in this connection. He then puts forward a theory of his own, claiming that God Himself gives His support to it. Where in all Scripture does God state that only one-hundred-per-cent Christians will be received by Him?

Was Peter one-hundred-per-cent when

our Lord, seeing his self confidence, told him he would deny Him thrice before the cock should crow? Immediately following the Lord's warning words to Peter He proceeded to tell His disciples that He was about to go away, but that He would come again and receive them unto Himself, that where He is, there they would be also, even in the Father's house. In addressing His disciples (among them Peter was included) He did not tell Peter that he would be left behind. No, none would be left behind.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthian assembly—the saints composing that assembly were far short of being one-hundred-per-cent. They were running after leaders, and thereby causing contentions in the assembly (1 Cor. 1.11), they were carnal; envying, strife and divisions marking them (1 Cor. 3.3), they were harbouring an incestuous man in their assembly and did not mourn about it (1 Cor. 5.2), they were going

to law, and that before unbelievers (1 Cor. 1.7), they were guilty of gluttony and drunkenness at the Lord's Supper and this led to the discipline of the Lord coming in, for many were sickly among them, and many slept (1 Cor. 11. 21, 30, 32), and finally, some were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15.12). At last the Apostle in his epistle came to the truth of the Lord's coming, and what does he say by Divine inspiration? Does he warn these erring saints that, being less than one-hundred-per-cent, they would surely be left behind? If ever there was a moment to proclaim the truth of a partial rapture, that only faithful saints would be caught up, here was the one grand opportunity to proclaim it. Listen to what the Scripture does say:—

“Behold, I shew you a mystery, We shall not all sleep, but we shall ALL be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible,

and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15.51, 52).

ALL surely included the carnal Christians, the litigious Christians, the self-indulgent Christians, the Christians holding false doctrine—ALL were included, yes, every one. The Scripture is surely final, clear and definite.

It is not that God is indifferent as to how Christians behave. On the contrary, judgment begins at the house of God, (1 Peter 4.17). That believers should be partakers of God’s holiness, His ways in discipline are ever active to this end. (Heb. 12.10). An extreme case is that of the Corinthian saints whose ways on earth were so dishonouring to the Lord, that in discipline He removed many by death, so we read:—

“When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor. 11.32).

We might comment on much more, but sufficient has been brought before the reader to show how Mr Austin Sparks' book, "The Centrality and Universality of the Cross," contains seriously wrong doctrine. It appears as if the author has got an unbalanced conception of the Cross, till at last he says it is not a phase of the truth -the feeblest believer knows otherwise, and thus he puts out of due proportion the great truths of the Scriptures, and in the end displaces the grace of God, and in its place puts human attainment, making man his own Saviour. We are indeed well warned against Satan appearing as an angel of light, and his ministers as ministers of righteousness. (2 Cor. 11.12-15).

The writer has no personal knowledge of Mr. Austin-Sparks, This examination of his teaching is purely in the interests of truth, and for the help of those who are in danger of being led astray. May God graciously deign to use this brochure

to this end, and to lead His people to that fount of living water—Christ Himself, of Whom the Father could say “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” and Who is the same yesterday—during His earthly sojourn—today in the glory, as known by the Apostle Paul—“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”—and for ever—in the coming era when, surrounding Himself, we shall sing that new song, “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood . . . and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5.9.10.)

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