

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

'A RESTATEMENT of some of the old problems of life concerning women, æsthetics, religion, evil, ethics and personality' is always welcome. In one form or another these themes have been the subject of high debate ever since man began to reflect upon life at all; and while some of the problems, such as those that gather round personality are relatively modern, others had already received as masterly treatment at the hands of some of the great thinkers of the ancient world, notably Plato, as they have ever received since.

But every age has its own approach, and a restatement is not only welcome but necessary. Such a restatement has been offered by Mr. J. W. T. MASON in a book called *Creative Freedom*, published at 15s. net by Harper & Brothers, and the first words of the last paragraph are from a statement in the Preface in which the author defines the purpose of his book. Six subjects so stupendous as those with which he proposes to deal constitute an ambitious programme; and the table of contents, which includes chapters dealing with the Spirituality of Matter, Heredity and Free Will, Evil and Nature's Cruelties, the Golden Age, the Search for Pure Spirit, the Evolution of Love, etc., sufficiently proves that the author means to be taken at his word. His discussions are neither parochial nor perfunctory, they are at once thorough—as thorough as is possible within the compass of

five hundred and thirty-eight large pages—and comprehensive.

The title suggests the influence of Bergson, and Mr. MASON generously acknowledges the stimulus he owes to that distinguished thinker and his philosophy of Creative Evolution; but he goes his own independent way. It is not exactly an easy way. Mr. MASON is very conscious of lying under the necessity of using arbitrary definitions to describe the unfamiliar, and until these definitions are mastered the book will not entirely disclose its secret.

The definition of most consequence for an intelligent grasp of the writer's argument is naturally that of the phrase which gives its title to the book. Creative freedom is defined as 'that condition of existence which permits creativeness to express itself by external, objective, individual self-realization which absolute freedom's disintegration prevents,' and the issue of it is a self-development in ever deeper and more versatile forms. A predominantly mystical religion would not, from this point of view, be satisfactory, but only a religion which maintained a lively interest in self-expression and in the expression of other personalities whose conjoint action weaves the fascinating web of history. A merely waiting and receptive attitude would not be enough.

The ideal for which the writer contends is a rebuke to all that is passive and anæmic, and a stimulus to what might be called a certain healthy materialism. It is committed to being practical, to seeing that things are done, and that is one of the characteristic features of Christianity; or, as Mr. MASON puts it, 'Christian principles in their purity sustain man's materialistic power.' The principles, for example, of brotherly love and goodwill to men, he contends, if they were to be adopted by the world at large, would permit spiritual creative activity to progress in terms of utilitarian prosperity, beyond any known basis for comparison.

He illustrates his point from the field of history by showing that the devotees of other faiths had sometimes a better apprehension of the implications of creative activity than the adherents of Christianity itself. In the Crusades, for example, Christians had lessons to learn from the Muhammadans. The former went forth in an expectant mood, trusting to the help of the Divine omnipotence, the latter trusted rather to creative activity. The disasters of the Crusades were therefore of immense value in forcing the Christians to put their faith in themselves and not in miracles. The whole theory of trust in omnipotent determinism for materialistic advantages had to be revised, and in the revision Christianity moved towards creative freedom, 'which movement we call the Renaissance.' This is undoubtedly an interesting interpretation of that great historical phenomenon.

The characteristic mark of Christian nations, we are told, is materialistic creative activity, coupled with an ever-expanding desire to spread economic prosperity among increasing numbers of people. Many would demur to this description; but Mr. MASON goes on to substantiate his point by citing the efforts of Christian missionaries to stimulate utilitarian production among the people to whom they preach in foreign lands, and to establish schools, hospitals, and similar institutions. It is not enough to save the souls of the converts, they

have to be taught how to make the most out of their lives in utilitarian terms.

Mr. MASON quotes an interesting comment, made by a Chinese scholar, on interviews at which he was present between Christian missionaries and Chinese officials. Never once was righteousness taken as the topic of conversation: all the talk was about railways, science, finance, medicine, technical education, and anti-foot-binding. We venture to think that the experience of the Confucian scholar must have been either limited or unfortunate, for surely no Christian missionary would be either ashamed or afraid to discuss the deep things of his faith with earnest men who were willing to listen to him. But Mr. MASON prefers to see in the scholar's comment traces of a misapprehension of the true nature of Christianity, which involves precisely such materialism—or materialistic idealism as he elsewhere calls it—as is indicated in those topics of conversation. The missionaries know their business, according to Mr. MASON, better than their critic: they are 'trying to stimulate creative activity.'

Incidentally one learns a good deal about the mind of the East from Mr. MASON, who in his exploration of Buddhism and Shinto, enjoyed the help of Japanese friends, and one of the aims of his book is to create a better understanding between East and West. Yet, when in his discussion of Art and Reality, he tells us that a typical Japanese poem may be limited to three words, we begin to feel that East is East and West is West and that they can only meet in souls of exceptional imaginative sympathy. The three words that constitute the poem he quotes indicate (1) a locality, (2) drizzling autumn rain, (3) a wild goose. That is all; but it is enough to stir the Japanese imagination to its depths: it creates the impression of solitude, dreariness, age, loss of friends, despair. Perhaps, as Professor Page suggests, 'it is, in a way, the Japanese equivalent of King Lear upon the heath.'

Not the least attractive part of the book is the discussion of Woman and Love. Man, we are told,

is a utilitarian, 'a centre of utilitarian creative activity'; woman, on the other hand, is a mystery about which the one thing which it is safe to say is that she is not utilitarian, and the more she tends to become so, the less does she retain her womanliness. Her interest is primarily æsthetic creativeness; and where, as in the inevitable household work, she becomes or seems to become utilitarian, this is only incidental to her real personality. 'Woman is the perpetual goddess, man is the perpetual materialist.' But materialism and utilitarianism, as we have seen, carry no objectionable connotations on the pages of Mr. MASON: 'utilitarianism is itself a spiritual movement,' and is one of the essential expressions of creative freedom. Or, as he puts it elsewhere, 'æstheticism develops only part of man's personality. It is utilitarianism that chiefly carries forward the movement of creative activity, with æstheticism serving to remind man that matter, nevertheless, is not all of life.'

In a large book treating unconventionally of many topics there are bound to be points at which some readers will feel a considerable measure of disagreement, and such points are not lacking in the volume before us. In the chapter on Ethics, for example, Mr. MASON argues that while we should all consider it immoral to boil a rabbit alive, we should not have the same feelings about a lobster; for 'we do not know whether the lobster suffers pain, *nor are we interested in knowing.*' And again, if a rabbit is killed by a cruel trapping device, 'we are undisturbed by this fact, *for we are too far removed for our imagination to be stirred to protest.*' We should be sorry to think that this represents the attitude of ordinarily humane, let alone Christian people. Such acts spring from a—shall we say—culpably neglected imagination, and the latter of the two sentences we have italicized almost admits as much.

Nor can we yield unqualified assent to Mr. MASON when he pictures what he calls the Danger of Internationalism. He thinks that it would suppress, or at least imperil, versatility of personality. Cer-

tainly internationalism, as he defines it, would be unlovely and uninspiring enough—as 'a single world-wide commonwealth, each individual citizen similar to all others and all seeking an international standard'; it would involve 'a disquieting tendency towards standardization of character and the mechanical sameness of life' in the different countries of the world. But it is difficult to see why personality need be jeopardized within the great group which we call humanity any more seriously than it is jeopardized within the smaller but still very large group of human beings that go to make up a nation. So far from standardization of character being inevitable, personality might conceivably be indefinitely enriched by contact, or at least familiarity, with so many different types. But such criticisms are only part of the tribute we pay to a deeply thoughtful and stimulating book.

More than two years have elapsed since the Right Rev. Arthur C. HEADLAM, Bishop of Gloucester, published the 'Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ,' being prolegomena to a study of the life of Jesus, and a discussion of the earlier part of the ministry. A promise was given that questions left over from that volume would be treated in a later work, and that promise has now been fulfilled in *Jesus Christ in History and Faith* (Murray; 6s. net), the contents of the book having been delivered as the William Belden Noble Lectures before Harvard University in 1924.

As in the former volume, the Bishop shows little sympathy with the destructive criticism of the gospel story that has been rampant in recent years. He seems, however, inclined to avoid even constructive criticism, with the result that he has not very much to say to those who wish to cling to historic Christianity but who are dissatisfied with the traditional expressions of the faith. He represents the conservative wing of those who adopt critical methods; the book belongs to the literature of apologetic, and the position defended is that of 'the

Christian creed,' though it would be a reasonable question to ask : Which Christian creed ?

A concluding paragraph sums up the author's own estimate of the sections of Christology. 'I have not attempted to do what people have sometimes aimed at, to distinguish the Divine and the human elements in Christ's life. I have not attempted to say what were the limits of His earthly knowledge. I do not believe that in His earthly manifestation His knowledge was more than might be that of a man inspired by the Spirit of God. His earthly teaching, His earthly life, His earthly personality, were entirely real, but I believe the true interpretation of all that experience and of the experience of mankind may be best studied and summed up in the words of the Christian creed.'

Mark's Gospel is accepted as being, in the main, a reliable account of Peter's reminiscences, and, further, as giving us a clear conception of the sequences of the main stages of the ministry. What we have in the teaching is not an echo of later ecclesiastical doctrine and discussions, but the tradition of the Lord's teaching as it was preserved in the Church between the years 30 and 70, little influenced, if at all, by the history of primitive Christianity.

Of the truth of the latter assertion we have three tests. In the record there are few or no anachronisms. We are in the Palestine of Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate, the problems and the phraseology are those of that age, and later events like the Fall of Jerusalem leave hardly a trace on the story. Then, too, the utterances ascribed to our Lord are those of one who had been born and had grown up in Galilee ; and, further, the teaching bears the impress of a single creative mind.

The difficulties of the Fourth Gospel are not fully faced, but few will quarrel with the conclusion that, while we cannot use it as a substitute for the other three, we may, with discretion, employ it to supplement them. Another subject on which one could

wish the Bishop had been more explicit is that of miracle. When Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the sea, 'immediately, we are told, the wind ceased.' What is the exact significance of 'we are told' ? A quotation of Mark's account of the Transfiguration is followed by the comment : 'I do not doubt that we have here a truthful account of a real spiritual experience, and I do not care to speculate as to what exactly were the objective facts.'

Yet the author hints, if he does not exactly say, that he accepts the stories of miracles as they stand in the Gospels, even of the Nature miracles. Rationalizing or semi-rationalizing explanations of these are bluntly declared to be obviously impossible. Either the report is incorrect, or we are up against something that cannot be explained on naturalistic lines. (But the Bishop's comment on the Transfiguration suggests that he is well aware that there is a third alternative, at least in some cases.)

If we look at the world not from the point of view of physical science but from the point of view of God's purpose, what appears as a breach of the normal method of the Divine working will represent just what would harmonize with that purpose. Dr. HEADLAM seems to imply, if he does not say so in so many words, that he accepts the story of the raising of Lazarus as literal history, inasmuch as it provides a consistent and adequate account of the incident and prepares the way for the end.

It will hardly be said that this somewhat hesitating acceptance of traditional views is very helpful. There is insufficient recognition of the way in which we can see miracle growing more miraculous even in the pages of the Gospels, and of the history of the allegorizing exegesis that preceded the Fourth Gospel.

Little sympathy is shown for the idea that primitive Christology was an amalgam of various conceptions that had had different histories ; such as Servant of God, Son of God, Lord, Wisdom of God,

Logos. Rather, the conception of Christ was there to begin with, and the categories which were applied to Him represent the attempt to unfold this conception. Historically, Christian theology has been the continued effort to explain and define the inherited Christian thought, in the language and according to the philosophy of each succeeding age.

Can we apply any tests of the worth of this revelation? In the developing thought of the Old Testament we find first henotheism and then monotheism; the thought of God is moralized; Israelites are conceived as being called to the service of the nations, and finally Jewish ambitions and dreams concentrate on one figure. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is represented as the embodiment of these Old Testament ideals and aspirations. Further, if we study the conception of the Christian religion as revealed, say, in the Corinthian Epistles, we find that there is nothing like it in pre-Christian times, not in the Jewish writings nor in Plato, not in the contemporary Seneca nor the later Marcus Aurelius. The Church is the product, not the cause of the gospel of Jesus.

Another proof is the inextinguishable vitality of the Christian faith in history, its all-conquering adaptability to every change in environment. The Bishop is prepared to accept the challenge even of our own day. The blight that falls where Turkey rules and the break-up of society at the French Revolution are but two illustrations of the principle that a nation broad-built on Christian lines can develop a higher type of civilization than a non-Christian people has ever attained.

Some one has said that if you tell the average Englishman that Mr. A. is the finest landscape painter in East Anglia he will be quite unmoved; but if you tell him that Mr. A. gets £1000 for a picture that he paints in four hours, he will, metaphorically speaking, fall down and worship him. A reviewer would be more than human if he could,

without an unusual sense of awe, take in his hand a book which bears on the front page of the jacket cover the intimation that it won a prize of \$6000.

There must have been much gnashing of teeth among the theologians of two continents when the winner of the Bross Prize for 1925 was announced. They had pictured the trustees as saying in effect to all intending competitors: 'Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy Israel,' Jacob and Israel representing in this case the modern way of looking at the Bible. Even the prospect of unlimited messes of pottage would not induce them to curse Jacob and defy Israel. And lo! when the result of the competition was announced, the prize-winner had blessed Jacob and Israel altogether; for no one will accuse Professor Douglas Clyde MACINTOSH of Yale of being an obscurantist.

If any more thoughtful or more timely book than *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (T. & T. Clark; 6s. net) was offered for this competition, it must have been a book of uncommon merit. It is a volume of Christian apologetic for the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century. In several respects it breaks away completely from the older apologetic. In the first place the newer apologetic realizes that it is no longer necessary for the Christian to defend everything that is written in the Old and New Testaments. That is a yoke which our fathers were increasingly unable to bear, and under which we decline to put our necks.

Further, we no longer make the credibility of our religion depend on the trustworthiness of the miracle stories. For one thing, once the claim to inerrant inspiration is given up, as it must be, it is exceedingly difficult to prove the historical truth of some of these stories. Further, if we could always vouch for the facts, we cannot prove that special Divine intervention is the only possible explanation.

But Professor MACINTOSH would go far beyond this. If God sometimes intervenes to get us out of our difficulties, we are entitled to ask: Why does

He not do so oftener? If our dilemmas were regularly solved by Divine intervention, we should never know anything of the way in which the things of Nature really work, and should never learn to adjust ourselves to their working. The development alike of our intelligence and of our moral nature would become impossible. 'We must take our choice: we may believe in miracles in the sense of arbitrary Divine interventions, or we may find a reasonable solution of the religious problem of evil; we cannot do both.'

Not only are pain and error not forestalled by Divine intervention; it is not desirable that they should be. He who would understand Christian prayer must keep this fact in view. It is human experience that the heavens are as brass towards any petition that asks for suspension or contradiction of the laws of Nature. Prayer is more than words, more even than sincere desire; it is the right religious adjustment, an adjustment, moreover, which does not leave the world as it was; for objective effects follow the right religious adjustment, which would not take place without it.

The essence of the old miracle faith is contained in what the author calls 'the new Christian supernaturalism,' the consciousness that we live in a responsive world. There is nothing esoteric about the experience; it is available for all who fulfil the necessary conditions. True answer to prayer is the sense of spiritual uplift that comes from right religious adjustment. This experience is not primarily emotional; it lies in the realm of the will. Thus the old antithesis between natural and revealed religion is overcome. The revelation of the reality of God that those have who respond to the leading of God is as natural and as normal as any other kind of cognition.

More fundamental is the other departure from the methods of traditional apologetic. We have been accustomed to assume that Jesus Himself is the rock of the Christian religion, the foundation on which the Church is built. Professor MACINTOSH

is keenly sensitive—too sensitive, many will think—to the extent to which a religion that bases itself on historic fact gives hostages to fortune. Is there no such thing, we may ask, as historical certainty about the past? At all events, it is only in the ninth chapter, the last but one in the main argument, that we reach a discussion of the historic Jesus. Still less may we expect any earlier reference to the theological Christ.

The method employed is to ascertain and establish the reasonableness of the essential Christian faith, and then to show that this faith was the faith of Jesus; for Professor MACINTOSH is of those who believe that Christianity is the religion *of* Jesus rather than the religion *about* Jesus. The essence of Christianity he finds in moral optimism, including a belief in freedom, in immortality, and in God. All these subjects are discussed in a frank and fascinating way, and on all of them the conclusion is that the Christian view is the reasonable view.

Where, then, does Jesus come in? We are given what is called 'a new Christian orthodoxy.' In the first place Jesus was Divine; He was Divine in His quality, in His personality, inasmuch as, through His dependence on and responsiveness to God, He achieved in exceptional measure the true moral life, the ideal life towards which the Divine activity was and always is directed. Moreover, if we sincerely appreciate the Divine quality of Jesus, and whole-heartedly respond to His spiritual appeal, if through Jesus we come to God in trust and love and self-surrender, the result is our moral salvation; so that Jesus is Divine in function as well as in quality.

But if Christ is Godlike, then God is Christlike. God is not only in Christ, but in the Christlike. This is the Christian doctrine of Divine immanence. God has revealed Himself in Christ as nowhere else; He has become *incarnate* in Christ. In the ever fuller discovery of God in Nature and in the Christlike, there is evidence of a Holy Spirit, a God of religious experience and moral salvation, who is

nevertheless not different from the Father God, the God of moral optimism. Thus, the author believes, a Trinitarian Christianity can be stated in terms that will appeal to those acquainted with modern historical scholarship and present-day philosophical concepts.

Recently there has been a happy revival of interest in the Old Testament, as well as a clearer sense of its value and importance. For some time it seemed as though the opinion that it was religiously negligible had gained wide acceptance. In educational quarters, for example, the fact was emphasized that the teaching of Jesus about God was the only teaching that ought to be given to children. And similar emphasis was laid on the undoubted imperfections of the Old Testament ideas. In these circumstances what was the good of teaching the Old Testament narratives, and thus giving to confessedly immature conceptions of God's character the authority of Scripture?

Fortunately a better standpoint has prevailed, largely through the work of our Old Testament scholars. And, though educationally the centrality of the teaching of Jesus is sound, we have not been allowed to lose sight of the real contribution which the Old Testament makes to our religious faith and knowledge. That may be summarized under four heads.

The Old Testament is precious to us for its own spiritual worth. We have only to think of the Psalms. Here you have religion, and not only religion but revelation, in the most practical and convincing form. A deeply exercised soul in its perplexity or sin or despair turns to God, and through this experience lays hold of God's grace in guidance or strength. You actually *see* God revealing Himself through the whole spectrum of human experience. This is religion in exercise, and at the same time the best and the most fruitful revelation of the reality of the living God. Think,

also, of what the narratives in Genesis tell us of practical religion. In the lives of Abraham and Jacob we see what fellowship with God means in the simplest and most concrete fashion. In the New Testament we have a *great deal of teaching* about life in God. In the Old Testament we see it being worked out in experience.

Then it is from the Old Testament we discern the actual truth of a Divine Providence in the affairs of men. You witness God intervening in the concerns of individuals and of nations. You discover a purpose being wrought out age after age. You find a people protected, enlightened, trained, delivered, punished, and led on from truth to truth, and faith to faith. And you see instruments being chosen, raised up, fitted and used in the service of this purpose. Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, the Prophets—here in the lives and labours of these men you see a Divine Hand, a Divine Will, a Divine Meaning behind events. You are *told* all this in the New Testament. In the Old you actually witness it being done.

Again (and this is a point of extreme importance), the Old Testament reveals to us the meaning of national religion. In the New Testament we are dealt with as individuals. It is for the most part personal salvation that is in view. The individual is the unit. It is true that the principles of Jesus are social in their implications. Love, brotherhood, the Kingdom of God, the fulness of life—these imply a social system. But the New Testament deals directly with individual souls. There was no nation of Israel, at least no State, to which to apply religious truth. And besides, the New Testament period is but a moment of time, as it were.

In the Old Testament it is different. The unit was the nation. The great truths of revelation were applied to national life. The will of God was declared for Israel. In the Prophets you can read what a really religious national life should be. You can read the true nature of a Christian people, for the principles and truths that ought to govern

national life are all to be found there. Justice to all, the dangers of intemperance, equal opportunities for citizens, the truth that every nation is the servant of God's will, the peril of excessive wealth and excessive poverty, all this is in the Prophets. And to-day when the dangers and evil results of a one-sided individualism are realized, and the social factor has come into fuller view, this contribution of the Old Testament to Christian political practice is of supreme value.

Finally, the Old Testament is the key to the New. You might as well think of the bloom as the whole of the flower, and neglect its root in the soil, as think the New Testament complete in itself with no need of the Old. Christianity grew out of the Old Testa-

ment. Jesus was rooted in the Prophets and Psalms. You cannot understand a page of the New Testament if you ignore the Old. Besides, if you wish to know how God revealed Himself to men you must look at the whole process in which and through which God made Himself known. Here you have a fact unique in history—a long course of events through which God was gradually and progressively making known His nature and His will. The climax was Christ. That is true. And it is true that He was the starting-point of a fresh course of events. But the revelation was made through and in the whole process, through the experiences, the incidents, the personalities of Israel's history. The Old Testament period was as essential and as revealing as the New.

The Midrash in the Gospels.

BY THE REVEREND PROFESSOR ALFRED GUILLAUME, M.A., DURHAM.

THE terms of reference of the MacBride Foundation are 'the application of the prophecies in Holy Scripture respecting the Messiah to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, with an especial view to confute the arguments of Jewish commentators and to promote the conversion to Christianity of the ancient people of God.' There is a robust vigour here which is absent in Old Testament scholarship to-day. There is a certainty, almost naïve, that Christian interpretation must be right, and Jewish interpretation wrong. Underlying these terms there is a presupposition which is fundamental. It is implied that there is in the Old Testament a stream of prophecy pointing to our Lord. This need not mean that all that Christ has become in Christian experience was prophesied aforetime; nor need it mean that the prophets contemplated the incarnation of a Son of God. But it does imply that the Old Testament is the basis of the life and teaching of the Giver of the New Testament.

It has often been urged in reproach against the Jews that they looked for an earthly kingdom and the reign of God's vicegerent here on earth. How

far were they justified, from a reading of the prophets, in looking for such a Saviour; and how far is it possible to sympathize with their disappointment and ultimate rejection of One who failed to realize those hopes? These are questions which strike at the root of the difference between Jew and Christian. The story of our Lord's slow and painful education of His disciples in the tragic import of the Messianic mission implies that the teaching of the prophets on this matter was obscure or obscured. It can hardly be denied that the disciples were deceived by preconceived ideas of the mission of the Messiah. If their views were in any way typical of the views of the average Israelite of the first century, then it is clear that the general expectation was not fulfilled in Christ. The Jews did not accept Jesus as the Christ because He did not seem to them to fulfil the conditions that current Messianism required. Inasmuch as they were the heirs of the theological and eschatological speculation of the previous centuries, they can hardly be held responsible for failing to recognize in the lowly figure of Jesus of Nazareth that Messiah with whom they had come to associate