

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.

ALL disciples of Christ are turning to-day with a quickened wistfulness to the Sermon on the Mount. The occasions of its utterance, and the critical problem of its structure have their own fascination. But the abiding interest focusses on the interpretation of its haunting sentences, and especially on their application to our everyday life. There is not a line which does not compel the consent of the Christian conscience. There is not a counsel which does not both rebuke and inspire to a more loyal obedience. Yet there are some precepts which daunt by the elevation and absoluteness of their demand. Not only simple and unlessoned folk, but the skilled and widely-read expositors of the Christian message are often held at a pause by the problems which beset every one who will attempt to obey some of its most imperative commands. To men and women living in the widely extended and yet close-pressed world of to-day, so complex in its social and political issues, some of its unfaltering sentences are bewildering. Others they explain away.

To those high counsels of Christ there are four attitudes. Some accept them without demur. Foremost among these are the members of the Society of Friends. And no one can refuse to respect the witness of the men and women whose lives, fashioned into self-denying service, prevent any hasty or dogmatic denial of their interpretation. A more impassioned defence was offered by Tolstoi, first in his early work, 'My Religion,' and after-

wards, with an admission that there ought to be a resistance to wrong, in 'The Kingdom of God.'

A second attitude stands over against this literal interpretation. It is based, although not always consciously, on Kant's dictum that we must universalize the principle of our action. We cannot safely interpret our relation to a counsel or command apart from the circumstances in which we are placed and the obligations of our relationships. We must consider every moral imperative with a due regard to humanity (both as represented by ourselves and by others) as the end, not as a means. It follows that these high and serious precepts which bewilder us must be examined in the light of the example and teaching of Jesus, and the principle which they regard must be clearly realized, so that the consequent action will fulfil the moral ideal enshrined. That is the common attitude to-day. Yet it must be admitted that this is not an easy task, and that too often Christ's simple, unqualified precepts are retranslated into counsels which are lower in moral standard, and more akin to worldly wisdom than the sublime motives of His appeals can justify.

A third attitude is taken up by those who protest that they are not willing to bleach the deep moral and spiritual colour of the words of Christ. But they point out that these counsels were delivered to Orientals, and are couched in phrases and under figures which arrested and impressed their minds.

Those difficult ethical precepts are set in picturesque proverbs. A proverb sets forth only one aspect of a moral issue. There are other issues and aspects which must be expressed by a complementary, if not contradictory, counsel. This attitude affirms that the absolute commands of the Sermon on the Mount must be compared, both with other proverbial utterances of Jesus, and with the broad trend of His teaching, if we shall determine the conduct of a Christian disciple in the life of to-day. Yet it must be admitted that this intellectual process too often tones down the high clear note of the demands made by Christ, and has led to a deeply-lodged belief that the laws of Christ can be fulfilled only by saints who no longer walk the streets of a modern city, or play a part in its social life.

A fourth attitude, which protests against all of these, is set forth in *Christ or Bentham?* by the Rev. Hubert SHEARS (Williams & Norgate; 3s. 6d. net). This 'little work' is really an essay, with an argument conducted in an eager spirit of resolved conviction. Its form is conditioned by its criticism of Dr. Gore's notable volume, 'The Sermon on the Mount.' A frank tribute is paid to Dr. Gore, and to the value of his teaching. But Mr. SHEARS assails the exposition Dr. Gore gives of the exalted counsels of Jesus. His argument is that Dr. Gore's exposition is based on the 'proverbial' interpretation of the arresting commands at which the modern mind stumbles. The precepts especially considered are those which state Christ's detailed law of meekness, and His forbidding of retaliation, with the issues they involve. It is insisted that these commands must stand in all their emphatic simplicity. And it is argued that when their motive and their method are understood, and their scope is realized, their purpose and their power will be manifest.

These contentions issue in the denial that 'The Sermon on the Mount is the moral law of the Kingdom of God.' That, he says, is Dr. Gore's misunderstanding, based on the acceptance of the sociology of Bentham—hence the title 'Christ or Bentham?' It is rather the portraiture of the

Christian character, and the call to a corresponding conduct, to the glory of God. Its precepts are concerned only with the relationship of individuals to individuals. 'The Sermon never once contemplates a situation which involves more than two human *parties*.' It is the supposed inclusive completeness, especially in regard to the laws of meekness and forgiveness, which has led men to apply its teaching to circumstances never contemplated by Christ. The Beatitudes look out on the face of a single man. The command: 'Give to *him* that asketh *thee*,' and its higher counsel of perfection, 'whosoever shall smite *thee* on thy right cheek, turn to *him* the other also,' are imperatives only between man and man. The argument proceeds to muster the proofs of the denial of the conception defended by Dr. Gore.

It is this overlooking of the limitations of The Sermon, Mr. SHEARS says, which has led to the attempt to apply its precepts to the social and political order, and especially to such action as shall have its well-being in view. But there is not the slightest reference to the 'profit' either of the individual with whom the agent is dealing, or of society in general. That is the obsession of to-day. It is the advantage of the recipient, and the greater good of society which hold the foreground in the modern mind, both in giving and forgiving. But the precepts of The Sermon keep only the character of the agent in view, with the conformity of his action to the character, and his eternal reward. The giver should, and will, practise 'indiscriminate giving' only because his character reacts to human need. So St. Francis gave his bounty to a tramp, and the Bishop in 'Les Misérables' bestowed the candlesticks on Jean Valjean. There, of course, are obligations to society. Had the Good Samaritan come on the scene while the thieves were at their work, he could not have observed a benevolent neutrality. But meekness is the attitude of the Christian character.

In his closing chapter the writer refers to the question which haunts the mind of a reader—Is there to be no call for the well-being of society? He makes two distinctions. The Sermon does not

engross the whole mind of Christ. We learn that, he says, from the full round of His teaching, and especially from His example. There we find a justification of anger, and an open opposition to wrong—but never to wrongs offered to Himself as an individual. So that, even as in The Sermon, both *parties* in view are within the brotherhood, as Paul also distinguishes between the attitude to a ‘brother’ and to those who are ‘without.’ More urgently, Mr. SHEARS affirms that the potent dynamic in the reform of the present social order, and its manifest evils, is the creation, discipline, and perfecting of the Christian character. That is the supreme purpose of Christ. It is also His method. Such a force would be ‘magnetic.’ It would convince, and convict, and leaven the world. The State has its own function. The less the Christian Church meddles with it the better, he thinks. But when the Christian man and woman bear this sublime character, the Church will exhibit and enforce its precepts, not motivated by the good of society, but by the inevitable witness of word and deed, which the Sermon on the Mount sets out, in the inescapable imperatives of the children of the Father.

Some time ago Dr. R. F. HORTON suggested that the time had come for Congregationalists, as a body, to elucidate their relation to modern thought, and to endeavour to state their faith in terms of modern discoveries. This suggestion materialized in the Oxford Conference of July this year. The subject stated was ‘The Christian Faith in the Light of Modern Science and Criticism.’ The papers read at this Conference are published in the current *Congregational Quarterly* (3s. 6d. net) along with certain ‘impressions’ from sympathetic observers.

As we should expect, the papers read are very able and suggestive. But we are not concerned at present to review these essays. What is more immediately interesting, and even more urgently important, is a point that was constantly raised in discussion, and that remains in the mind of one of these reporters as the main issue of the Conference. It is this: How are the conclusions stated by

the speakers to be got over to the people in the pews? These latter have not the remotest idea of the convictions, or even the point of view of the leaders of religious thought to-day, in the matter of critical results and their effect on belief. There is a tragic gap between the scholar and the pew to-day.

There is indeed another gap which made itself evident at the Conference, that between the scholar and the pulpit. Very many ministers are not really in touch with the actual conclusions of recent thought and recent criticism. It was evident, for example, that Lewis Muirhead’s ‘Message of the Fourth Gospel’ was unknown to many at the Conference. We do not judge a minister’s knowledge by his acquaintance with this particular book. But the one instance is symptomatic. The reason is that books cannot be produced cheaply enough, and ministers’ salaries are so inadequate that the newer books are often out of their reach. It would be a very real contribution to the welfare of the Church if a scheme were instituted for putting the new books within reach of the average minister.

But it is the other gap which is more serious. On the one side of it is the scholar whose conclusions are being absorbed gradually by the pulpit, even if many ministers are still vague about them. And these conclusions are revolutionary from the traditional point of view. But the ordinary man is still largely in the dark about them. A silent revolution has been going on in belief among the cultured and the experts. But the man in the pew is (largely) still at the traditional standpoint. And if the gap goes on (as it does) widening, the situation may become a tragedy.

How is the gap to be bridged? Not very much help was given on this question at the Conference. Indeed, the various utterances on some points leave one bewildered. Take the question of Authority, which is perhaps what the ordinary Christian is most deeply concerned about. There are two bodies who have perfectly satisfactory convictions on this matter. One is the Fundamentalists. To them the Bible is the absolute, inerrant, infallible

authority. The other is the Roman Church. To it the Church is the infallible authority. Now the Congregationalist leaders naturally reject both these views. But what do they put in their place?

Dr. HORTON asked the question: 'What are we Congregationalists to present as our authority?' He rejected the infallible Scripture and the infallible Papacy. And what did he put in their place? Truth. The human mind is so constituted, he said, that it can rest in truth alone. But the ordinary man asks: What is the Truth? My truth may be your error? Is there no objective, no definite standard or person that I can regard as infallible? Not even Christ is the Authority as Christ, so to speak. 'Christ is the Authority for us because He is the Truth,' says Dr. HORTON. Christ is the Authority, not because He is Christ (that is the thing that will impress the plain man), but because He is the Truth.

But Professor MICKLEM took a different line. 'In religion as a whole there is no final and infallible authority except God Himself.' And later on he says: 'Our authority is our personal consent to the faith of the Church as it comes to us through the Christian community and is for us corroborated in the Gospels.' All this is somewhat confusing. And it suggests the question—Is there any kind of body of conclusions of which you can say, 'this is our faith which we present to you'?

The belief about the Bible is another point. The plain man in the pew will say of Christ, 'Christ is my Authority because He is Christ.' But what is he to say about the Bible? He has a vague idea that something is wrong, that the belief in which he was nurtured has been done to death. He is uneasy. He does not know what has been put in its place. The old view has been given up, he knows. But he does not possess any positive conviction to put in its place. And the evil of this is that every kind of definite effort, every kind of service and consecration, depends on people having a positive faith. No revival of religion will ever come to a Church that has no definite belief on which to set its feet. The old revivals came

to men who believed something. *Any* revival can only come to men who are able to say, 'I know what I am standing on.'

This is not a plea for the traditional faith. It is a plea for a teaching ministry in the Church. It is more than time that the people in the pews were told definitely what has been the actual result of science and criticism for the Church's faith, for its use of the Bible and for its attitude to Jesus Christ. However it is done, this new knowledge should be passed on to the pew. Not surmises and theories, and not original guesses, but knowledge, things that have been made clear and definite. How and in what sense are we able to believe in the Bible as the Word of God? And in Christ as the Son of God? And in the Church as the Household of God? There are multitudes of men and women waiting for answers to these questions.

There is a fresh and interesting chapter entitled 'Q and Country Life,' in the Rev. J. M. C. CRUM'S *The Original Jerusalem Gospel* (reviewed in another column). He finds much that is suggestive in the actual words of the Logia, which are couched in the language of homely village life, 'of men ploughing or harvesting, of women grinding at the handmill or baking at the oven, of children, hungry, or playing at weddings or funerals, or asleep on the floor, of open country and open skies, the birds nesting, the fox in his earth, the wild flowers, the hen and the chickens that peep between her feathers.'

But it is not the language of homely village life in general that is used in Q. It is that of Galilean village life. An illustration is found in the saying in Mt 5⁴⁰, 'If any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.' Here the editor of the First Gospel preserves the local colouring of Q.

As Mr. CRUM puts it, 'The Syrian peasant has two clothes: an inner shirt which is more or less a luxury: an outer cloke which is a necessity, and which, in fact, is the only garment of the poorer peasants. The law had regulations to guard the

poor man from the loss of his cloke. Without it how cold he would be, at night ! In Mt, the inner coat goes first. It is lost in some village quarrel, a lawsuit on a little scale. And the Christian is ready to give up the cloke also and go naked.'

Now the editor of the Third Gospel, who also uses Q, is unable to preserve the simple Galilean local colouring, and here and there we have a sense of loss as we read his text. A Greek hand has been at work upon Q in places. One such place is the saying above quoted from the Matthæan text. In

Lk 6²⁹ it reads, 'And from him that taketh away thy cloke withhold not thy coat also.'

As Mr. CRUM remarks, 'the scene has changed ; so has the dress.' 'In Lk the Greek has fallen among thieves. And the thief snatches, naturally, at what comes first to hand, at the outer cloke, first. And the Christian surrenders the shirt as though it were his extreme loss to go without that.' He adds that it is easy to guess in such cases which version, that of the First Gospel or that of the Third, stood in the original Aramaic.

Present-Day Faiths.

Anglo-Catholicism.

BY THE REVEREND N. P. WILLIAMS, D.D., LADY MARGARET PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

I.

THERE are few terms in common use which are so difficult to define as 'Anglo-Catholicism.' The word does not stand for a distinctive creed: for, in the belief of its adherents, Anglo-Catholicism is nothing other than Anglicanism, properly understood. Nor does it represent a substantive sect or denomination: for all 'Anglo-Catholics' are *ex hypothesi* members of the Anglican Communion, and would forfeit their distinctive name if they abandoned the fellowship of Canterbury. It is rather a movement and a tendency, operative within the English Church and her daughter Churches, as recognizable to sense-perception, though as difficult of exact comprehension and description, as a wave-crest moving across the surface of the sea. Moreover, there is no authoritative enumeration or census of those who are to be classed as 'Anglo-Catholics,' nor is there any person or body of persons possessing the right to determine who can justly claim this title and who cannot. A recent controversial document, which demanded that 'Anglo-Catholics' should define and publish their principles, received no reply—not unnaturally, in view of the fact that it was not directed to any definite address; it would have been as reasonable

to challenge the bimetallists of the world to meet and formulate their creed. Any attempt, therefore, to state the essential religious values underlying the Anglo-Catholic movement must necessarily be subjective, representing those aspects of the movement which appeal to the writer, rather than authoritative or official in character; and any such attempt would almost certainly be repudiated by one or other of the groups which are commonly classed together under this name. Nevertheless, there is enough coherence and unity in the movement to render possible a formulation of the basic position underlying all its various phases and manifestations; and where, in the following account, a sentence or a paragraph expresses not so much what Anglo-Catholicism is at the present moment as what the writer hopes that it will in the future become, the reader will be duly warned of the fact.

II.

It is a commonplace to distinguish between religion and theology, between the felt experience of union with God and redemption through Christ, and the work of the intellect, which endeavours to describe in scientific terminology the implications