
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

Books that have influenced our Epoch.

Herrmann's 'Communion with God.'

By Professor H. R. Mackintosh, D.Phil., D.D., Edinburgh.

Herrmann of Marburg's *Communion with God* belongs to that small class of great books on theology—McLeod Campbell's *Nature of the Atonement* is another—which also are great books of devotion. Its devotional quality is so marked that Troeltsch was on one occasion tempted slightly to talk down to Herrmann as an 'edifying' writer. If he meant simply that in Herrmann's work theology has again become religion, we have no need to quarrel with his adjective. *Communion with God* is Herrmann's most expressive book, in which his character as the prophet of theological sincerity, of absolute reverence for fact, informs every sentence. An even more original work is his (untranslated) *Ethics*, in which he continued in a Christian sense as no other has done the ethical thought of Kant; but it is unlikely, for obvious reasons, that this treatise will ever make so wide an appeal or evoke so peculiar a feeling of personal gratitude. It is on his *Communion* that Herrmann's reputation chiefly rests, at all events in English-speaking lands.

The book was first published in 1886, and by 1921 had reached its seventh German edition. Each new edition represented a careful working over of the preceding text, the changes sometimes being fairly radical. The fourth German edition was one of unusual importance, for it contained a new summary and division of the contents; and these, to the great benefit of readers, were incorporated in the second English edition of 1906, which had been prepared by the Rev. R. W. Stewart, B.D., now of Aberdeen. This, as every one knows who has used it, is an admirable rendering. But the service done by the first English edition translation of 1895, the work of Mr. Sandys Stanton, must not be forgotten. Of the German original in its first form Denney complained, justly enough, that it was 'provokingly devoid of order and method'; though he added: 'it gives a more vivid impression than any other production of the school (of Ritschl) of the real religious interest which animates its adherents.' As we have it now, there is no great difficulty in finding our way about.

The reading of this book has for many been a religious event. They have put it down with a new thought of the solemnity and greatness of the gospel, of the incomparable grace of Christ to the sinful; as well as with a new conception of how best the gospel may be presented and vindicated in an age of physical and historical science. Herrmann has done more than any other man in our time to elucidate the basal meaning of Christian faith. He once said of himself that he taught theology because he could not preach, because the gift had been denied him so to speak of Jesus as to bring His image before men's souls with living power. But he was wrong. It was just this that he did incomparably, as all can bear witness who have sat in his lecture-room.

In some degree, Herrmann's *Communion* is a polemical book. He fights on a double front. On the right he opposes traditional orthodoxy, or what to-day we should call Fundamentalism, more especially its demand (explicit or implicit) that before dealing believingly with Christ we should first give in our assent to the exact truth of the gospel narratives and the apostolic doctrines about Him. On the left he confronts Liberal Protestantism, which bids us believe like Jesus, and share His ideas, rather than believe on Him and trustfully find God personally present in His life. To the orthodox he answers that we cannot simply take the real doctrines of our faith out of the confessions of other men. 'Whenever men deal thus with other men's professions of faith, even if those other men be the apostles themselves, they remain essentially Roman Catholics. . . . The most important task of theology is to open men's eyes, and lead them to see that nothing can be revelation to them except what actually lifts them into communion with God' (p. 39). To the liberals he protests that general ideas, even though as wonderful as those contained in Jesus' teaching, may indeed be accepted by us; but they do not transform us into the forgiven children of God.

Herrmann's attitude to Scripture, although in this book he finds no cause to treat of the subject at length, is thoroughly positive and evangelical. He insists that we must gain a clear insight into 'what the Bible ought to be for every Christian, namely, the means by which with his own vision he lays hold of the Person of Jesus.' 'The Holy Scriptures are truly reverenced when they are,

first of all, investigated in their historically determined reality; and when, in the second place, these books are used, just as they offer themselves to us, so that in them we may seek out the revelation of God' (p. x). What the Biblical tradition offers us is the spiritual picture of Jesus, something that becomes for us the most precious of all things, because we perceive in it the approach of God to our soul, His judgment and His compassion. And this would be utterly beyond our reach, did we not in tradition meet with the witness of others to what they had found in Christ.

I said a moment ago that some of the best qualities of a preacher were found in Herrmann. One of these is the gift of saying what is really important over and over, yet always in new forms. Alike in his lectures and in his *Communion* he is perpetually declaring that through Jesus the invisible God touches and saves us, and that the revelation of the Father to our souls takes place when we meet with Christ and feel His power. Concerning 'the inexhaustible riches of the inner life of Christ' he spoke and wrote with plain words and manly feeling, as one who daily was thinking about Jesus with all his might. And his reflections about Jesus were religious as much as they were moral. His one pre-occupation was the significance of Christ for our fellowship with God; that Person of the first century (though timeless in power) is the fixed basis of faith. When in 1906 I had the privilege of talking with Herrmann in his study, he said one thing I have never forgotten. 'I,' were his words, 'consider myself infinitely nearer to Nicæa than Schleiermacher or Ritschl. They put Christ alongside of God, and argued from the one to the other. I find God personally present in Jesus Christ.'

Herrmann's endeavour was to escape from the protracted intellectualistic debate which in his day went on between the orthodox and the liberals, by bringing out clearly to view what the inward life of faith really is—that inward believing life which it is the task of theology to express. Hence the first question is how people actually arrive at personal believing life. This is a question of vital importance for evangelism as much as for theology, and Herrmann's theology is the theology for the evangelist who in a world altered by science is trying to clear a way for Jesus to the mind and heart of modern men. Now, as we have seen, Herrmann felt deeply that matters came to be turned upside down, and Christianity was being rendered unintelligible, when it was made a prerequisite of communion with God that we should first give our assent to this or that theological doctrine. It was not that such doctrines were false; often in themselves they were wholly true. But worthily as in the right place, and at the right time, they might express the convictions of the believer, they must not be thrust on men with the demand that, to find God, we must accept and subscribe them first. The right order of events must not be inverted. The doctrines will come to their own in due time. 'One who comes under the grasp of the spiritual character of Jesus wins a right appreciation of the doctrines about the Person of Jesus, so that he can find in even them that one thing great and precious to him above all else in the world, the power of this personal spirit over men who are yearning to become conscious of God' (p. 3).

Communion with God, then, comes about not through our merely receiving information about Him, but through His making Himself known to us in a self-evidencing fact, a fact which invades our life, and will not be put aside; a fact, moreover, which belongs to the very reality in which we ourselves are embedded. This fact is the Man Christ Jesus. Faint beams of revealing light may have reached mankind through other personalities, but these are no more than fragments of revelation. Other religions, too, are disqualified from helping us in our sorest need by the circumstance that their devotees and we belong to different worlds of experience. This applies even to the Old Testament, true as it is that Israel had a real knowledge of God and enjoyed communion with Him before Christ came. 'We by no means wish to assert, even for a moment,' Herrmann urges, 'that the savages of New Holland have no knowledge of God, no pulsations of true religion, and therefore no communion with God. But we do not know through what medium such knowledge and such communion reach them. We cannot enter fully into the religious life even of a pious Israelite, for the facts which worked upon them as revelations of God no longer have this force for us. . . . Since we cannot feel as Jews, the revelation which was given to Israel can no longer satisfy our need' (pp. 62–3). 'Jesus Christ alone can be grasped by us as the fact in which God so reveals Himself to us that everything that hides Him from us vanishes away' (p. 63). Through the historical Christ, the Father brings us to fellowship with Himself.

Only, be it observed, in order that a man should be capable of apprehending Christ as the great unveiling of God, one pre-condition must be fulfilled. The man must first have wakened up to the

seriousness of the moral life. In ethics, Herrmann is an out-and-out Kantian. That is to say, he starts from the unconditionally obligatory character of the moral law. Indeed, not till the moral law grips us are we in touch with what is absolutely real. Nature is a scene of the merest relativity; the mind is led on endlessly from one phenomenon to another, like a row of cards each leaning on its neighbour. Conscience alone lifts us up to essential reality. We cannot, for instance, trust a friend without becoming conscious that for us he embodies a worth, a dignity or greatness which is totally irrespective of any utility for our interests he may possess; also in order that we should enter into real friendship with him it is necessary that we should credit him with some degree of moral conviction. But we cannot, any of us, feel such trust in another without being stirred personally to the same moral earnestness as we honour in our friend. With what result? With this result, that the effort to live nobly in this sense inevitably brings a serious man into dire straits. Unfailingly he begins to realize his own sheer inability; his eyes open to the fact that he is, ethically speaking, a dead failure. All earnest men lie under this painful weight, without prospect of escape, except those who have been able to find in history a great fact which, by its impression and influence, lifts us above this inward conflict, because it fills us with victorious moral power. In other words, our consciousness of wretched incapacity to obey what we know must be obeyed unconditionally would make morality a hopeless incubus, if the categorical imperative of duty stood alone. But it does not stand alone. The historic fact of Jesus Christ confronts us as a revelation of the Power behind the moral law. If the moral law thunders its unconditional commands, Jesus meets us with the positive assurance, conveyed by the simple fact that His attitude to the sinful is just what it is, that through faith in the God disclosed in Him we shall be able to obey triumphantly. But Jesus could not make this impression on any man who is not morally in earnest.

We have spoken of 'the historic fact of Christ.' But what precisely is meant by the historic Christ? Between us and the Jesus of the first century there stands not merely the New Testament tradition, but this tradition as cross-examined by modern gospel criticism. These formidable considerations force Herrmann to give a more exact statement of his drift. If some one should ask: How am I to know that the Jesus of the Gospels is real? Herrmann answers that certainty obviously cannot be achieved by the method of historical research. Historical science yields no more than probability. And 'what sort of a religion would that be which accepted a basis for its convictions with the consciousness that it was only probably safe' (p. 72)? What really happens to create *certainty* in the earnest seeker's heart is not so much that he lays hold of Jesus as that Jesus, with irresistible power, lays hold of him. 'If we have experienced His power over us, we need no longer look for the testimony of others to enable us to hold fast to His life as a real thing. We start, indeed, from the records, but we do not grasp the fact they bring us until the enrichment of our own inner life makes us aware that we have touched the Living One' (p. 74). This, as Herrmann finely puts it, is 'the free revelation of the Living to the living.'

Thus to the question what it is in the New Testament tradition of Jesus Christ that stands out as a fact operating directly upon us at the present hour, Herrmann replies, it is Himself, it is *His inner life.* The decisive experience is that we see Him for ourselves. We know Christ to be real because we are overwhelmed, mastered, captured by the power with which He brings Himself home to conscience and thought.

Let us not miss the all-determining emphasis which Herrmann lays on what he thus calls 'the inner life of Jesus.' Everything hangs on this. In Jesus we behold a spiritual life that at once reveals goodness perfectly, and perfectly realizes it; we see absolute trust in God's holiness and almighty love; we see a pity and grace which lifts up and comforts the sinner whom His holiness has covered with shame. Now that presentation or image of Jesus, as a Person, carries within itself the evidence of its own reality. We have not to argue laboriously for its being there; we have only to let it tell upon us and shine by its own light. Through it there dawns upon us the holy love of God, promising full and free forgiveness, promising moral victory like the victory of Jesus Himself. Here is a longer passage into which Herrmann concentrates the whole of his gospel for a world of sin.

'God makes Himself known to us as the Power that is with Jesus in such a way that, amid *all* our distractions and the mist of doubt He can never again entirely vanish from us. . . . The existence of Jesus in this world of ours is the fact in which God so touches us as to come into a communion with us that can endure. Of course, we learn at the same time how great the gulf is between Jesus and ourselves; and we feel it the more keenly, the more

we become alive to that strength of His character which so overwhelms us that it makes the reality of God undeniable. But for this very reason the God we recognize is not only the God of Jesus Christ. He is our own God. This follows from the fact that the Man through whom the reality of God becomes visible and certain to us stands in the attitude of friendship towards men who feel themselves far removed from God. . . . God enters into such sort of communion with us that He thereby forgives us our sins. Without forgiveness we should still remain without a free certainty of the reality of God' (pp. 98–9). Our experience of this communion of God with us takes place in such a way that it at the same time effects our moral deliverance. By so coming to us in that Historic Life as to make us quite sure of Him, God brings it to pass that right living ceases to be a problem of despair and instead begins to be the very atmosphere which we breathe. As he puts it in another paragraph which possesses, as I confess I think, the quality of ultimate Christian truth, so far as human lips can utter it: 'Any one who has let the fact of the personal life of Jesus work upon him, and who has been led thereby to trust in Him, cannot help thinking that there is a Power over all things, and that this Power is with Jesus. In what he experiences at the hands of Jesus, he feels himself in the grip of this Power. Through Jesus he has not merely an idea of God; he has the Living God Himself, working upon him. The man who has attained that is a Christian.'

This is a position, Herrmann contends, to which criticism of the Gospels can never be dangerous. For it cannot touch this fact of Christ, which has become the best element of our very existence, and it may therefore be safely allowed to run its course freely. Not indeed that historical criticism can supply a true foundation for our faith. But there are two great services it can render: it can remove false supports of faith, and it can force us ever anew to appropriate more personally the presentation of Christ which the Gospels offer.

The inner life of Jesus, to which Herrmann constantly refers the reader, is not left by him at all vague or indeterminate. He dwells, rather, on such concrete features as these. Jesus stakes His life for the realization of the Kingdom of God, in a Messianic consciousness far transcending all Jewish hopes, and remains undeterred even by the prospect of death. He is lifted high above all the martyrs by His consciousness of perfect moral purity; He knew Himself able to lift away the load of guilt from the hearts of those who should remember Him, as we see most conspicuously in His attitude at the Last Supper. He was confident that through His influence He could lift men to a life of moral triumph. Or, to sum up everything in one of Herrmann's most memorable sentences, 'Jesus knows no more sacred task than to point men to His own Person' (p. 93).

All this leads up, naturally and inevitably, to Herrmann's wholly experimental confession of the Divinity of Christ. It is not that if we wish to enjoy the mediation of Christ we must first confess His Deity. General ideas of incarnation have no saving import; we must first know Jesus Himself. 'It is what we experience in the Man Jesus that first gives definite content to the confession of the Deity of Christ' (p. 128). And in the second place, if we are to utter a sincere confession of the Deity of Jesus, it is necessary that we should have known God. Until God becomes a power in our inner life and makes us new creatures, our thoughts about Him are necessarily false. But once we have felt in the fact of Christ the mighty working of God upon ourselves, the way to apprehend the real meaning of the doctrine opens up. That 'mighty working' consists in this, that in Jesus' presence we become aware that God is forgiving us. It is Jesus who has mediated to us the pardon of our sins, not however by His teaching but by being to sinners what He was. An *ipse dixit* even of Jesus would have availed nothing. As Herrmann puts it in one of the most often-quoted passages of his book: 'Jesus did not write the story of the Prodigal Son on a sheet of paper for men who knew nothing of Himself. He told it rather to men who saw Him, and who, because of His own personal life, were to be sure of the Father in Heaven, of whom He was speaking' (p. 132). What the sinful saw in Jesus before the end was that this Man, who gave access to the Father, knowing that nothing else would avail, sacrificed Himself, and so took on Him their burden. While dispensing forgiveness, He at the same time did everything to establish the inviolable justice of God's moral order. The doctrine of vicarious atonement proves its value at just this point—it comforts the anxious and penitent believer. 'It helps to overcome the doubts which are always springing up again as to the reality of the forgiveness which has been experienced' (p. 136). Christ did not merely proclaim the forgiveness of sins, nor did He merely render it a possibility. Rather He bestows it on us, as our mind, for the first time and ever anew, opens through Him to faith in the Father. 'His death, as He bore it and as He

expounded it in words at the Last Supper, becomes to us the word of God that overcomes our feeling of guilt. The God who comes near to us in Christ reconciles us with Himself by that death' (p. 142).

For the man to whom all this has grown experimentally true, the confession of Christ's Deity is inevitable. 'The experience itself is such that when we confess His Deity we simply give Him His right name' (p. 143). We have found God in the Man Jesus. We have become able, as Luther expresses it, to count God and Christ all one. The Deity of Christ does not mean merely that a Divine substance underlies the human life of Jesus; it means that in Jesus the personal God is actually turning to the sinful and opening His heart to them.

He sums up his answer to those who claim that all genuine Christology must move on Chalcedonian lines in the following incisive paragraph. 'The question whether we are right in speaking of the Deity of Christ when we have found God turning towards us in the disclosure of Jesus' personal life, must be decided according as we conceive God to be in His nature a substance on the one hand, or on the other hand a Personal Spirit who asserts His nature by the energy of a will directing itself towards certain ends and preserving in itself a certain disposition. If we choose the former conception of God, then certainly the proposition that there is divine substance in Christ will be chosen as the proper expression of belief in His Deity; but if, on the contrary, the latter conception be followed, which is clearly the only one represented in the sacred Scriptures, and the only one permissible in the Christian community, then it is self-evident that the Deity of Christ can only be expressed by saying that the mind and will of the Everlasting God encounters us in the historically active will of this man' (pp. 177–8).

It is because of this life-and-death emphasis on Christ as Redeemer, who brings us to God, that Herrmann becomes the irreconcilable foe of essential Mysticism. 'We differ,' he says, 'from the mystic solely in the way in which we become aware that God is touching us'; but the difference is not one that can be adjusted. The mystic, in his specifically mystical character, is cool towards everything that can be called historical revelation; God, for him, is the Eternal in remoteness from time. This is definitely non-Christian; for to the New Testament believer God is the Eternal who draws near to us in an historical Person. Jesus Christ is God present for us, surrounding us with grace and compassion—this, and this alone, is the authentically Christian position. The mystic, besides, has little understanding of that 'faith' which is a sinner's only religion. 'But the man who has found Jesus Christ, and God in Him, can dispense with mysticism, for in the narrow experiences into which mysticism withdraws, there is no room for the life of Christian faith' (p. 199).

The exhibition of Jesus as the Person through whom God becomes revealed to us as our own God is the strain in Herrmann's *Communion* which makes it a book that has influenced our epoch. Other elements in the volume do not so much concern us now. We are less interested than he in finding chapter and verse in Luther for each of the vital positions laid down. Nor need we at the moment be engrossed by his demonstration of the ethical impulses with which faith in God is charged. The real point is that in an unequalled measure Herrmann has been able to show how the person of Jesus wins complete dominion over us in an experience which transforms our lives and makes us to be of those who, in St. Peter's phrase, 'through Him believe in God.' Quite possibly those who long for light on this point—which will always be central—may be reading Herrmann a hundred years hence. Some men help their fellows in ways that can never be obsolete; and through this timeless strain in his *Communion with God* the Marburg thinker will speak for generations.

Tobit and the New Testament.

By J. Rendel Harris, Litt.D., LL.D., D.D., Birmingham.

The title which we have given to the present essay will seem to the uninstructed reader, and perhaps also to the Biblical expert, to involve a conjunction of matters that are necessarily disconnected; we may be asked at the outset why we have thrown them together. Tobit is, even when judged favourably, entitled only to a secondary position in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, and on that account not likely to be a determining factor in the text or in the ideas of the New Testa-