
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.

DR. WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, the well-known American theologian and writer, has published 'a study of the supernatural' under the title of *God at Work* (S.C.M.; 6s. net).

It is no coldly intellectual dissertation such as may commonly be found in books of theology and science. It has primarily a religious interest, and it throbs throughout with deep religious feeling.

One of the characteristics of our time, as Dr. ADAMS BROWN sees, is 'an enhanced sense of the need and of the possibility of a more vital personal religion.' This is evidenced in various ways, as, for example, in the Anglo-Catholic revival, the interest aroused by the Barthian theology, the influence of the Oxford Group Movement, and in the Far East the Kingdom of God Movement in Japan. 'All these different movements are parts of one great movement in which God is recalling our generation to Himself; and the future of the Church, if not of civilization itself, will depend on our rediscovery, in the midst of the confusion and heartbreak of our time, of the living God at work.'

In this connexion a reinterpretation of the supernatural factor in religion is needed, for, although the theoretical issues raised by supernatural religion are important, yet the whole subject can be rightly approached and its true significance correctly perceived only when it is seen in its bearing upon personal religion. For, while the supernatural has an interest for the mind, bringing us face to face with the central problem of philosophy, it has an even more vital interest for daily life. To believe in the supernatural means, in a word, '*to believe in a God at work.*' 'It means to be convinced that, beyond the realm of relativity and finiteness of which alone physical science is cognizant, there exists an ultimate good which sets the standard for all our striving and in which we may find the satisfaction of our deepest desire. But it means more than this. It means that God is making Himself known to us in definite and recognizable ways. To believe in the supernatural, as that belief has been held by those in whom the love of God has become a controlling principle and passion, is to be aware that things happen, partly in the world without, partly in the world within, which, lifting us above our ordinary horizon and reinforcing our limited powers, make us immediately aware of the divine presence and enlighten us as to the divine purpose for us and for our world.'

The reality of this experience raises at once the whole difficult and intricate subject of the relation of the natural and the supernatural. Here great confusion has arisen because these terms have been used vaguely and in different senses, and there is much need to clear the ground by strict and accurate definition.

Nature is often used in the sense of the physical universe, and so by contrast the supernatural

means the spiritual. 'Personality in this sense is supernatural, and to say of God that He is supernatural is to say that, whatever else He may be, He is like us in being self-conscious and self-determining spirit.' Again, Nature is taken to mean the predictable, the dependable, the realm of uniformity. 'In contrast to this second meaning of nature, the supernatural is the novel, the unpredictable, the creative.' But, perhaps, the most common meaning given to Nature is the actual, as distinct from the desirable or the possible. 'The supernatural in contrast to the actual becomes the ideal, the normative, the perfect—in a word, the absolute.'

If we combine these three qualities of the supernatural—the spiritual, the creative, the perfect—in a single adjective, we get the sacred or the divine. 'Interpreting them as characteristics of the ideal object which sets the standard for our life, we get the transcendent reality faith calls God.' This faith in God as the supreme reality, when challenged, must be put to the proof in human experience. We must examine the testimony of those who believe themselves to have had first-hand experience of it. Of such testimony there is a continuous and impressive record from the earliest ages down to our own time. There have always been, and there are to-day, those to whom God, instead of a name, has become a presence, and the supernatural a living reality. For them the world has become a different place. 'It is no longer possible for them to be satisfied with the conventional, self-centred life which most people are living. For they have been introduced to a life far more worthy and satisfying; one that assures to its possessor the things after which all true men aspire—insight, renewal, freedom, joy. . . . And having once tasted this new life, one can never be contented with the old.'

The question of miracle, that is of the immediate contact of the supernatural with man, has been much debated from the scientific point of view. But such debate does not touch the heart of the problem. Miracle, in the only sense in which religion is interested in it, may be defined as 'an exceptional event, or quality in an event, in nature or in human life, the significance of which consists in the fact that religious faith sees in it the self-revealing activity of God.' The religious man's persistent belief in miracle is just his confession of faith in a God who can do new things. Conscious of his needs, man looks about him for some source of adequate help. 'Is there or is there not some power that can meet his needs, heal his sickness, assuage his sorrow, blot out his guilt, renew his vitality, lift him above the limitations of his environment? Is God, or is He not, alive and free, able to meet present needs as well as the needs of the past, to act here and to act to-day? Miracle answers this question in the affirmative. It is the point at which God touches man directly in the present. It expresses the creative aspect of religion.'

It is unfortunate that the common identification of the supernatural with the miraculous in the sense of the arbitrary or the exceptional has raised in the modern mind strong objections to supernatural religion. This identification is really an inheritance from mediæval theology. In earlier times the line was not so sharply drawn between God's revelation in the natural and in the exceptional. 'It was Thomas Aquinas, the great thinker and saint, who has been so largely responsible for shaping the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church, who did most to fix the distinction between nature and the supernatural in the form in which it has come down to us.' To him all Nature was *fallen* with man, and therefore belonged to a wholly different realm from the supernatural. Hence any revelation of God must come from without and be unpredictable and abnormal.

It is necessary that we widen our conception of miracle. 'We cannot be content with the view that at certain rare intervals of time God intervenes in the world for man's salvation, while for the rest He has left man to himself. We must recover faith in the living God actively at work for the realization of moral ends. The division of territory which underlay the older treatment of the supernatural is no longer possible for us.' For miracle, as religion conceives it, is never a wonder simply; it is also a

sign. It is something which carries with it an irresistible conviction of the Divine. 'It is not simply the fact that something strange has happened, still less something that science cannot bring under natural law; but that something has happened that gives light where there had been darkness before, and joy where sorrow had had sway.'

Taken in this sense, miracle has an enduring significance for religion, and so long as God is conceived in personal terms it can never be outgrown. When we thus extend its meaning, miracle loses the suspicion of being something irrational, a suspicion which has done so much to alienate the modern mind. It becomes an indispensable part of that continuous process through which God reveals His presence and communicates His grace to men.

Doubtless we cannot prove this to those who do not share our faith. It will always be possible to deny the reality of purposive action both in God and man. But for most of us such a solution of the problem of life is profoundly unsatisfying. 'We are conscious of energies which impel us to activity and of ideals which set the goal to which our efforts should be directed. . . . And what we believe of ourselves we believe *a fortiori* of the unseen Actor who has fashioned star and sun and sea, whose footsteps we can trace in history, and whose voice we hear speaking in the silence of the soul. He, too, is working toward an end, and He, too, comparing the present with the past, notes progress in the accomplishment of His plan. As we find in our own experience no inconsistency between law and freedom; as we, too, using materials given to us according to principles we cannot change, are yet able to bring new things to pass, so it is with God. And the forward steps in His onward march, the stages in that creative evolution which is the law of the divine life, are what religion knows as miracle.'

There is an interesting article on 'The Outlook for Religion,' by Professor Wilhelm PAUCK of Chicago Theological Seminary, in the *Congregational Quarterly*. The title is intriguing, because we are all at once arrested by such a word as 'outlook.' It does not matter what our particular concern may be—football, tennis, education, the Church, science, or Nature—we are desperately keen to know what its future is going to be. And when the matter is put so broadly as Professor PAUCK does, and deals with the greatest and deepest and most urgent matter that concerns us all, our attention is at once gained, and we are eager to know what this prophet has to tell us.

Well, the first thing the Professor points out is reassuring. It is expressed in somewhat academic and Teutonic periods, but translated into plain English it is this. Like Professor Adams Brown he sees that a spiritual wave is passing over the world at present, but he uses 'spiritual' in a wide sense to embrace all the great activities of the human spirit. Philosophy has become less theoretical and more positively sympathetic with a religious interpretation of the universe. The natural sciences have become less aggressively naturalistic and are obviously aware that their descriptive function needs to be supplemented by metaphysical understanding. The same tendency is seen in art, and even in psychology and sociology. The world is being lifted on this wave away from materialism in thought and closer to the viewpoint of religion. That is an important fact. It might be said that there is at the present moment being seen a world-wide, deeply significant, and immensely influential 'spiritual' revival.

This is a challenge to the Church. Can the Church live up to it? The answer to this question will determine the future of religion. In all sorts of phrases, which are sometimes a little difficult to understand, Professor PAUCK insists that the Church's response must be 'contemporaneous' and 'historical.' In other words, the Church must use the spiritual opportunity to face the tasks presented to her by the state of the world around her. And this reflection leads the Professor to examine the resources of the Church and her fitness for the work at her hand.

On two matters he is quite clear. One is that we cannot go back to the past in order to revive its

former movements. This is what he feels Barth is doing. He stands for something big and true, but, as he states it, something which is exaggerated. It is something which was once adequate, but does not contain the truth for which this age calls. At the same time, Barthianism is a much-needed protest against the weakness in religious conviction characteristic of much modernism. Liberalism in religion has done great service to the cause of truth on one side. Its defect is that often it has no positive message. This was pointed out years ago by Professor B. W. Bacon, in one of his ablest books. Modernism in its critical aspect has stood for something valid and true. But nothing can endure that is merely critical, and, when we are considering the outlook for religion, we must admit that its modernistic form will have a very uncertain future unless it has a gospel for mankind.

Professor PAUCK seems to think that this may be said generally of the humanism of our time. Its religious weakness has arisen out of its emphasis on experience as the source of authority. The word of God has been replaced by the experience of men, submission to the revelation of a supernatural, miraculous Sacred History by the adventure of experimentation with human ideals. And the logical issue of this has been seen in the assertions that theology is simply a form of anthropology, and that the reality of 'God' is simply a dream of man, an image of himself. The theology of Barth is therefore an entirely justified criticism of this anæmic humanism. And this is largely its value. It is a corrective. It is not a constructive theological movement, as it over-emphasizes divine transcendence.

That is one side of the truth, but all the same it is not all the truth. If Barthianism exaggerates transcendence, modern humanism lays an equally false emphasis on immanence. In that way it has narrowed the real truth as much as the new Calvinism does. Professor PAUCK rejects Barth's system, but he simply cannot get away from Barth, and he admits that what the German leader stands for is something that must be carried with us into the future. We need the Barthian conviction. We need a gospel. Humanism does not give us this. Barth does. And our American guide, while he becomes rather vague towards the end of his article, strenuously contends that 'the religious man can never be autonomous.' All true, vital religion must be 'theonomous and theocentric.' These cumbrous phrases mean, we imagine, that the religious man does not find the source of his religion in himself, but in a revelation that comes always first from God and with authority.

Professor PAUCK's criticism of Barth would be more effective if he were not so indefinite himself. He admits the weakness of humanism and modernism. He admits the need of authority. He asserts that real religion must have its centre in God and God's act. But when we ask *where* this is to be found, he is somewhat misty. He invokes the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* as the power and guide for the real knowledge of God. And he comes back to his starting-point to supplement this. 'Two things then,' he concludes, 'determine the outlook for religion: the question is whether we will take our own historical situation seriously, and whether we will take God seriously in His divinity. If we take seriously both God and our own situation we shall be led to a life derived from God which is truly contemporary. . . . Such a consciousness is a bequest to us from Jesus Christ. He is still our Lord to-day, and the world will one day be His Kingdom.'

We may be allowed a brief comment of our own. In our world to-day we see three things. The spiritual wave to which Professor PAUCK refers is a real fact, and will yet bear the religious movement to a higher plane of certainty and insight. But in the religious world there are two antagonistic systems of religious thought in operation—the humanism that finds authority in experience, and the new Calvinism that finds it in the living Word of God. Long ago Frederick Robertson of Brighton said that the truth never lies between two extremes, but is always found by putting the extremes together, like the halves of a divided orange. Does not the outlook for religion lie in the direction of

combining the truth in humanism with the truth in Barthianism? There lies the task of the future —there, and in facing the modern world and its problems with this religion of authority and experience.

'Conscience' is a word often on our lips. It is a great and challenging word. We remember the rhapsodical language of Butler and of Kant concerning conscience or the moral law within. The plain man is often heard to say as his final and unanswerable reason for refusal, 'my conscience will not allow me.' The Chancellor of the Exchequer not seldom gives public thanks for the receipt of adventitious 'conscience-money.' What exactly do we mean by conscience? What is this which evoked in Kant a like emotion to that produced by contemplation of the starry firmament; which will not allow the plain man to embark on some course of action; and which impels the hard-pushed tax-payer to hand over that uttermost farthing in which he was for a time rejoicing as a clever keeping back of something that the Inspector would never know about? On what does the 'manifest authority' of conscience rest?

Is conscience, as has sometimes been asserted, 'the voice of God in the soul of man'? Or is it the voice of the social order making itself heard above the clamours of individual desires? Is it 'Philip sober' reversing the judgments of 'Philip drunk'? Or is it the recognized and accepted Ideal rebuking failure and contradiction? What utters the 'thou shalt not' which gives us pause, or the 'thou shouldest not have done' which brings the blush to the cheek, or sets up in the heart the anguish of remorse? We see that conscience is not alike in every man. By that we do not mean merely that we find some people far more 'conscientious' than others, or that some seem to be troubled by no 'conscience' at all. What is meant is that people equally 'conscientious' come to quite different views of their duty. Mary Stuart told John Knox that she had a conscience as well as he, and that it suggested different action from what he desired; to which the strong man replied that of course her conscience was but ill-instructed and so was no safe guide.

Here is a very deep difficulty. If all men's consciences do not enjoin or forbid the same—and plainly they do not—what is the measure of authority of any man's conscience; and by what standard may one man's conscience be judged superior to another's? By what right did Knox claim to be on a higher level than Mary? Can we escape from purely arbitrary dogmatic assertion? And in any case does conscience always tell us with unmistakable clarity which is the correct solution of a moral problem that confronts us and requires action of some kind?

Such questions are not sophistical, nor are they framed in view of fanciful circumstances. They are questions that are often asked. In the minds of many adolescents, who are not just mischievous but on the contrary are in dead earnest, those are very real and very important problems. And we older folks, who when we were young were rather more timid in raising questions, are frankly sometimes almost baffled to give answers which satisfy ourselves, not to speak of our inquisitors. Under their rapid fire of questions we begin to feel limp and uncertain; until not only the authority of conscience, but the reality of conscience, begins to appear nebulous. Many may therefore be grateful for the Rev. Archibald CHISHOLM'S little book on *Conscience: Its Nature and Authority* (Nisbet; 3s. 6d. net). It is a little book, and we wonder why it is not larger. A comprehensive work on the subject is needed, and Dr. CHISHOLM is fully equipped to write it. Let us, however, be thankful for what we have. It is worth having; for it traces at least the line of thought along which our interested young people in Bible classes or in the family circle or in private study may be directed towards light on their problems as to conscience.

What is conscience? Strict dictionary definition is scarcely possible. Dr. CHISHOLM suggests that we may best come to understand its nature in view of its function. Will this do to begin with? —'the principle within the soul which asserts the

supremacy of those standards by which our actions should be judged.' Yes, two very essential things are there brought together: in conscience we are concerned with something which is our very own—it is a 'principle within the soul'—but it is concerned with standards at least not entirely our own.

Whence come the standards to which conscience is never weary of pointing us? Well, they are of composite origin. Many things contribute—race, nation, prevailing custom, the general cultural level, parentage, and so on. Are they forced on us, then? By no means. Such things are only the raw material with which each individual has to work in building up his own, quite definitely his own, personality.

All very well; but on what grounds can it be maintained that one standard or set of standards is superior to another? Let Dr. CHISHOLM speak. 'In recent philosophy considerable attention has been paid to what is called the common-sense view. There has developed a general point of view which is the product of many minds and the result of the experience of many generations. It is not merely the view of the average man; nor yet is it the general opinion resulting from the consensus of educated minds; but it is something very persistent though liable to partial modification from generation to generation. Unless there is conclusive argument against it it must hold the field.' This common-sense view regards man as a spiritual being who can truly realize himself only in proportion as the claims of his spiritual nature are recognized. Conscience guides men in this quest for true self-realization, which will often enough involve self-repression.

Conscience is not static. From age to age man grows in moral insight. Dr. CHISHOLM can thus conclude that men with their intuitive sense of values will come to see that in Jesus their ideals find their only adequate expression. So conscience comes to mean 'the divine voice speaking through the teaching of Jesus, making itself known in the moral consciousness.' In that sense, and only in that sense, Dr. CHISHOLM, we take it, would agree that conscience may be rather rhetorically, and somewhat ambiguously, called 'the voice of God in the soul of man.'

Conscience being not static, and Jesus having imparted and illustrated principles, not a mass of precepts, practical difficulties may be frequent and perplexing. To raise for ourselves the question, 'What would Jesus do?' is seldom helpful; because the situations in which we feel most need of raising it are just those in which it is next to impossible for us to contemplate Jesus ever being involved. We land, too, in difficulties as to 'compromise.' Some purists hate the very word. But like it or not, the ordinary Christian, if he is to live in the world at all, has often and often to make some sort of compromise. Luther and Calvin both found it so; and Dr. CHISHOLM reminds us that compromise in some sense is not only enjoined but exemplified by both Jesus and St. Paul. Then there are all sorts of difficulties which arise through what is erroneously described as a 'conflict of duties,' which Dr. CHISHOLM prefers to call a conflict of standards, as when the claims of patriotism seem to be incompatible with domestic responsibilities.

Of such perplexities Dr. CHISHOLM has no golden solution. We may well doubt if there be any discoverable, or indeed if life would be so interesting and so worth while if there were. But Dr. CHISHOLM'S discussion in itself is far more helpful than any formulated casuistical calculus would be. 'Cases of conscience resolved'—we are long past that, except perhaps in the Roman Confessional, and God forbid we should seek to return to an enterprise which is not only impossible and futile, but which experience has often proved to be deadly to the true life and healthy vigour of conscience, which, let Dr. CHISHOLM remind us, is a 'principle within the soul.'