

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.

GIFFORD LECTURES are not a promising field from which to draw material for the simple Notes which these columns usually contain. But there is a chapter in Dr. TEMPLE'S *Nature, Man and God* which seeks to make a point to which we should like to call our readers' attention. It is the chapter on the 'Moral and Religious Conditions of Eternal Life.'

The point is virtually made, as we remember, by Dr. TEMPLE'S teacher at Balliol College, the late Dr. Edward Caird. It appears even to be implied in the Gospels, where Jesus says, 'God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' Into the meaning of this passage we shall not enter further than to say that it appears to represent God as the guarantor of the life to come: those who walked with Him live still unto Him.

What, then, is the point in question? It is that the hope of eternal life properly springs from faith in God. It should not precede faith in God. If our main concern in relation to things eternal is to be with our own future state, it might be better that we should have no hope of immortality at all. For the great aim of all true religion is to transfer the centre of interest and concern from self to God. If assurance of immortality were to come before assurance of God, it might hinder that process.

'If God is righteous—still more, if God is Love—immortality follows as a consequence. He made

me; He loves me; He will not let me perish, so long as there is anything in me that He can love. And that is a wholesome reflection for me if, but only if, the result is that I give greater glory to God in the first place, and take comfort to myself only, if at all, in the second place. I wish to stress this heavily. *Except as an implicate in the righteousness and love of God, immortality is not a religious interest at all.*'

If our desire is first for future life for ourselves, or even first for reunion with those whom we have loved and lost, then the doctrine of immortality may do us positive harm by fixing us in that self-concern. But if our desire is for God's glory, and for ourselves that we may be used to promote it, then the doctrine of immortality will give us new heart in the assurance that what here must be a very imperfect service may be made perfect hereafter.

For this reason it seems to Dr. TEMPLE positively undesirable that there should be experimental proof of man's survival after death. It might or it might not encourage faith in God; and it would certainly make true religion's task more difficult, which, as already said, is the transference of the centre of interest and concern from self to God. Self comes into religion only as that one thing which each can offer for the glory of God.

Referring further to the possibility of experimental proof of survival, Dr. TEMPLE says: 'If such

knowledge comes, it must be accepted, and we must try to use it for good and not for evil. And I could never urge the cessation of inquiry in any direction; I cannot ask that so-called Psychical Research should cease. But I confess I hope that such research will continue to issue in such dubious results as are all that I can trace to it up to date.'

In recent years the question has been raised whether it is right to speak of Christ as *a man* or as *Man*. The preference of writers like R. C. Moberly and W. P. Du Bose was for the latter, but it can hardly be said that the modern reader finds much that is illuminating in Moberly's *obiter dictum*: 'He was not generically, but inclusively, man' ('Atonement and Personality,' 86). All the more, therefore, have we reason to be grateful for a fresh setting of this problem to Professor W. F. LOFTHOUSE, whose book, *The Father and the Son*, is reviewed in another column.

Professor LOFTHOUSE speaks of Jesus as 'a man,' but at the same time reminds us that He was man in the sense in which the disciples were not. 'What they were imperfectly, He was in completeness. What they had, mixed with dross and alloy, He had in a purity never known before.' To Professor LOFTHOUSE this fact is so important that he does not think we need to ask 'whether the Incarnation meant that He shared our human incapacities and ignorances.' He even suggests that this does not matter. 'What if He was ignorant of the mariner's compass, the composition of gunpowder, the procession of the equinoxes? . . . A man is neither less nor more a man for such talents and acquirements as these.'

The important consideration is 'the penetration by which He divined the secrets of the human heart, the sympathy which led Him to the centre of human affections, the passionate love that drove Him to all lengths that men might learn through Him to all brothers, and the unbroken confidence in God which made the unseen world more real and vivid than

anything that the senses could provide.' This persuasion leads Professor LOFTHOUSE to state a conviction which is not less attractive because it is expressed in paradox: 'He was man because He was what no man had ever been before.'

The above is an example of many fine thoughts in Professor LOFTHOUSE's book. Another instance of his discernment appears in his condemnation of a very common method of interpreting Jn 17²¹: 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me.'

Professor LOFTHOUSE is among those who think that this passage has suffered sadly at the hands of expositors in being taken as a prayer for the reunion of the now severed churches of Christendom 'only to be attained, as many would hold, by some agreement on the "historic episcopate," or the supremacy of the Pope.' 'Jesus,' he writes, 'was thinking of something else than this when He compared their unity to the unity between Himself and the Father.' In point of fact, the unity is that of 'doing, willing and loving as the Father does, wills and loves,' and it is this for which Christ prays on behalf of His Church.

A third example may be added from the discussion of Mt 11²⁷: 'No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him' (cf. Lk 10²²).

Are we to conclude, with E. Norden, that this passage is the isolated expression of the views of a 'school' unrepresented elsewhere in the Synoptic Gospels, and is it, as Hase called it, 'an aerolite from the Johannean heaven'? The informed reader knows where to turn for a recent and well-balanced discussion of this passage in Dr. A. E. J. Rawlinson's 'New Testament Doctrine of the Christ,' and will remember the frank, if somewhat disappointing, conclusion which is reached in the long Note at the end of the volume (Appended Note iv.). Dr. Rawlinson remarked that as an

expression of Christian belief about Jesus the saying is intelligible, and that as a saying uttered by Jesus 'it is less easy, though perhaps not impossible, to explain.' With this attitude of suspended judgment, it is interesting to compare the conclusions reached by Professor LOFTHOUSE.

'True, there is no other statement in the Synoptists quite so explicit as this; but the habitual language of Jesus, as we have it in the Synoptists, points quite unmistakably to a unique knowledge, an intimacy, a special sympathy, existing between Jesus and God. Of this, others could know nothing; for the fatherhood referred to in the Sermon on the Mount does not penetrate this inner region of mutual knowledge. But if Jesus claims this special access to God, what is all His teaching but one long act of revealing His own knowledge to those who have ears to hear?' The saying, Professor LOFTHOUSE claims, 'is not an erratic boulder. It is rather the central point of the whole terrain.'

St. Paul's is fortunate in having as its new Dean Dr. W. R. MATTHEWS, for his is one of the strongest and clearest intellects in the region of contemporary thought. Anything he writes arouses interested anticipation, and we are never disappointed in the result. An example of this competence will be found in the volume of addresses delivered at the Cromer Convention in June of this year and recently published under the title *Newness of Life* (S.P.C.K.; 2s. 6d. net). Dr. MATTHEWS' subject was 'God as Transcendent,' and we summarize the main points.

The importance of the subject lies in this that it takes us to the very centre of the modern controversy concerning religion and concerning Christianity. For the main obstacle to the spread of Christianity to-day is not so much any lack of good will, and certainly not a lack of the feeling of need for religion, but rather an absence of understanding of what Christianity really is, and the presence in many minds of an unfounded suspicion that the old message of the gospel is no longer in

harmony with modern knowledge. There is a widespread willingness to allow that religion has a justification for itself, that there is some being who can be described as divine. But where the hesitation occurs is precisely before this great truth, the truth of a transcendent God.

There are three possible views of the relation between God and the world. It might be held that God is the ground, and the world is the consequence of God, in the same way as a triangle is the ground of the properties of a triangle. God, that is, is the immanent reason, idea, or thought which is inherent in the world, and from which all its characteristics inevitably proceed. Such a view would, of course, be a view that God is not transcendent at all.

Secondly, it might be held that God's relation to the world is that of the source from which everything emanates. That was the idea which was held by the Neo-Platonists. The analogy to illustrate this is that of the sun and its rays. Just as the rays of the sun proceed out from their originating centre, so it is that everything flows forth from God. The central Orb, God, transcends all the grades of living which turn towards it and move towards it as their goal. This is a doctrine of Divine Transcendence. But it is not the Christian doctrine, because it seems to suggest that everything proceeds from God by an inherent tendency, that there is, so to speak, an inevitable overflow of the Divine Nature.

The third view, which is the Christian view, is that God is related to the world because He is its Creator. He is not simply the ground of the world, but the cause of the world. He originates it, and does so by an act of choice or will. This is essential to the Christian faith, because it is vital to that faith that we should think of God not only as the supreme Reason, but also as the Holy Will and Holy Love in whose hands we are. The analogy here is that between the artist and the work of art. Just as the artist is expressed in his work, and yet he is other than his work, so we may think of God as expressed in His creation, and yet never ceasing to be other than it.

This was the doctrine of the Prophets. For them God is first of all the 'Far God,' above and beyond our thought, dwelling in inscrutable majesty. And God is transcendent in two respects, first as the Creator and providential Governor of the world, and, secondly, as the Giver of the Law of Righteousness. Virtue and goodness for the Hebrew were not primarily the expression of man's true nature. It is doubtful if the Hebrew would have understood the conception that goodness is man in his real being. He thought rather that the heart of man is desperately wicked. Virtue for the Hebrew is fundamentally obedience to the Law given from above by God. Yet it must be said that the prophetic message brought together in a marvellous manner the 'Far God' and the 'Near God,' the transcendent and the immanent which are always implied in each other.

The same is true of Christ's teaching about the Kingdom of God. It used to be said by liberal theology that the Kingdom of God was somehow closely connected with our ideals of progress. This is now seen to be a mistake. The idea of the Kingdom had little or nothing to do with our conception of a progressive evolution towards a better state of things. On the contrary, the root idea was that of an intervention of God. The Kingdom, as Jesus preached it, is to be brought in, not by human efforts, or by gradual advance, but by a gracious act of God. And the blessedness of those who are Sons of the Kingdom had little or nothing to do with the amelioration of social conditions. It is rather the entrance into a new life with God through His grace. The conception of the Kingdom is bound up with the idea of the transcendence of God.

This principle of transcendence is to be seen at work throughout the universe wherever we like to take it up. Reality seems to arrange itself into different orders of being—the material, the living, the mental, and the spiritual. But these orders of being do not exist in water-tight compartments. One leads on to the other, and the higher is built on the lower, while, at the same time, the lower finds its goal, its meaning, in the higher. And it

is only when we look from the higher point of view that we get a full understanding of what is prior and lower.

Everything in the world, every kind of being, seems to be engaged in an effort to transcend itself. And all our efforts to make a self-explanatory system are brought to nought. The attempt to think of Nature as a self-working machine is now clearly a futile effort. The attempt to think of History as a sufficient interpretation of the universe has been shown as decisively to be impracticable. To understand Nature we must postulate something beyond Nature, and to understand History we must postulate something beyond History. Wherever we take up reality with an attempt to understand it, we are confronted with the fact of transcendence.

Thus there are good grounds on which belief in a Transcendent God can be defended in the court of human reason. But we must not leave it there. In the end our chief ground for such a faith is in the religious experience itself. There is no final account of religious experience, not of Christian experience only but of religious experience in a wider region, which is adequate, that does not see in it a witness to the intrusion of a living reality into the soul of man, a reality which dwells not only in the cosmos, but beyond it: that is to say, the Transcendent God.

The Rev. Albert Edward DAY, Pastor of Mount Vernon Place Methodist Episcopal Church, Baltimore, delivered a course of lectures on the Lyman Beecher Foundation in which he sought to indicate the problems of personality and their answer in Jesus. The lectures are published under the title *Jesus and Human Personality* (Abingdon Press; \$2.00). The chief points expounded are, how to deal wisely with appealing mental images (for Jesus it was the thought of what it would be to be a true Son of God), how to achieve an abiding self-respect, how to satisfy the need for comradeship, how to solve the problem presented by moral failure.

Mr. DAY illuminates the approach to each of these places of difficulty with which the ever-striving self is confronted on its way towards fullness of personality, and he does this with the aid of many an effective illustration drawn from a treasury both new and old, in which are stored the fruits of wide reading and keen observation. In the closing chapter he discusses the secret of effective preaching, addressing himself to his fellow-preachers particularly, and we should like to put some of his positions before our readers.

First, he speaks of a tendency in the modern pulpit which greatly weakens the effectiveness of its ministry to personality. It is the blurring and sometimes practical exclusion of Jesus. 'Sir, we would see Jesus,' and not abstract philosophies, hypotheses of science, witticisms, epigrams, histrionics, the preacher himself, is the unconscious complaint of many congregations. When congregations see everything else but Jesus, that is the first great threat to an effective ministry.

The second is when Jesus is much praised by name but never revealed in His thrilling, vitalizing reality. Abstraction, generalization, verbalization are the besetting sins of the ministry. It is not enough to urge people to 'come to Jesus.' One must also give specific directions which will make the exhortation something more than mere evangelistic verbiage, which will provide a technique for the appropriation of those rich values for personality which are found in Him; so that they who 'come to Jesus' will be nearer to His moral and spiritual beauty than those who apparently stay away.

Turning now from the threats to an effective ministry, Mr. DAY goes on to say, first, that through good preaching there should stream the redemptive influence of the ideas of Jesus. Sermon series in which the major emphases of Jesus are linked together in a living whole have great value. But

of greater value is it for the preacher to have his own mind so saturated with the ideas of Jesus that he cannot help letting those ideas shine through his every public utterance. And he should toil arduously in the effort to re-state the ideas of the Master in language which makes them vivid and real to the struggling souls before him.

Second, the ideas of Jesus must be creatively imparted. Some preachers make prison walls out of them and attempt to confine people to the area thus enclosed. But His ideas should be presented not as mere patterns to follow, but as inspiration to men to make their own patterns in the light of their own immediate problems. Often the value of Jesus for His followers is not in any specific direction He may give in any concrete situation, but in His preparation of the soul for a new revelation which will enable it to meet its immediate problem with insight and power.

'Preaching that makes for personality must let people have the redemptive, liberating, unifying influence of the person of Jesus. . . . He influences men not by teachings merely but as a teacher; not by His sayings only but by His soul; not as a mirror in which are reflected eternal values, but as a man. . . . Such a fact has great significance for preaching. It means that it must be the preacher's constant endeavour to let men see Him, not merely His teachings but Him.'

Finally, effective preaching must reveal the unique relationship of Jesus to God. It is as a revelation of ultimate reality that He makes His supreme appeal. Doing things for Jesus' sake becomes doing things for God's sake, and this makes labour significant and hopeful. Nothing grips the heart and stimulates the mind like the conviction that what Jesus was God is, and that our struggle to be like Him has the universe as an ally, and that our striving selves are, in the effort to achieve personality, co-labourers with God.

