

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>



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

itself opposed. It is impossible for any one who sees this to believe that God can ignore it. It is impossible for him to believe that God asks men to forget it without more ado, and to dismiss from their life, not understood and not used, the painful experiences of sin, law, wrath, the flesh, death. The law as an outward thing passes, but between its passing and the coming of the spirit stands the whole body of Christian facts centring in the death and resurrection of Jesus. These facts are the condition of the spirit's coming; its coming is not direct, but mediated through them. The power to live a holy life is not poured into a sinful nature claiming immediate fellowship with a holy God; it is bestowed on such a nature, according to Paul, only through Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The righteousness of God, which is the answer to the whole necessities of the sinful world, is not revealed *in vacuo*. It is not transmitted into human nature by the vibrations of some sort of spiritual ether, as one might infer from the comparisons which are sometimes used to illustrate it; it is demonstrated in Jesus Christ set forth as a propitiation, through faith, in His blood. It is this which we have next to study in all the relations suggested by what we have seen of sin, the flesh, and the law.

JAMES DENNEY.

SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

III.

THE DIVINE WILL IN NATURE.

THERE is one thing about the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament which has often struck me as peculiar. Although from beginning to end they are pervaded by the action of a designing God, they never state that the world was created with any extraneous design—for any purpose

outside of the world itself. We are introduced at once to the stage of creation ; we are allowed to admire the scenery ; but we get no hint of any *motive* for the decorations. We never read that the world was planned for the sake of something else. We hear of salvation planned for the sake of the *world* —to put right things that have gone *wrong* . But there is no indication of an outside design for which things were originally made *right* . This is all the more remarkable because in the Bible the element of choice occupies so prominent a place. From the narrative of Eden to the narrative of Galilee, from the presentation of the tree of knowledge to the presentation of the Son of man, the human soul is confronted with a choice. “ Chosen of God,” “ elected of God,” “ doing the will of God,” are expressions which lie at the very base of the sacred narrative. And yet we look in vain for any direct statement of the motive which prompted the collective work. We hear God say, “ Let there be light,” “ Let there be a firmament,” “ Let there be sun, moon and stars ” ; we hear Him say, “ Let there be earth,” “ Let there be life,” “ Let there be man ” ; but we hear not the why and the wherefore. What is the destination of this magnificent fabric ? Is it to be a temple or is it to be a hospital ? Is it to be a place for the glory of God, or is it to be a school for the training of Man ? Is it to be a home for the human spirit, or is it to be a foreign land in which the human spirit is to learn its *absence* from home ? To these questions there is no answer. The Architect in the Book of Genesis keeps silent as to the design of the building.

Now, do not misunderstand me. Do not imagine I allude to this as a blemish in the Christian Scriptures. To me it is no blemish ; nothing shows so much the artistic character of the Bible. The Bible contemplates her creative God as an Artist-God. The true artist should have no purpose beyond his art itself. He should not paint for money ; he should

not sing for fame ; he should not write poetry to propagate political opinions. He may accept these things as a *result* ; he should never make them a motive. He should have only one motive—the rapture he feels in the work itself—the beauty of the picture, the sweetness of the song, the worthiness of the subject to be expressed in poetry. The constant refrain of Genesis is “ God saw the work that it was good.” That is an artist’s refrain. Every outside purpose is banished. Utility is banished ; the search for gain is banished ; the love of praise is banished. Everything is superseded but one—the desire to give adequate expression to the life which is within him. When he thinks he has found in the outside world an adequate expression of his own ideal, he cries, “ It is good, it is very good.”

I will say, then, that there is in the Christian Scriptures an unspoken purpose of God, and that it is evidently an artist’s purpose. The aim of the artist is to embody in outer form his inner life—to make something in his own image. God’s image, say the Christian Scriptures, is embodiment—manifestation of His Spirit in the flesh. It is not an outside purpose ; no artist’s is. It is, what every artist’s is, the wish to construct an image which shall represent in bodily form a life corresponding to His own *ideal* of life. Life is to be created, not for what it may do, but for what it is. What the Divine Artist would image is life itself—highest life, His own life. He would reach a manifestation of the perfect form, the permanent form. He would reach it by ever-ascending gradations ; He would climb to it. Step by step He would carve the perfect living form. He would exhibit the mounting scales of being—from movement to light, from light to solidity, from solidity to growth, from growth to sentiency, from sentiency to reflection, from reflection to intuition. He would manifest the progress of the vital stream from its rising in spontaneous forces to its rest

in the great sea of balanced powers—ether, earth, crystal, plant, fish, bird, mammal, the primal man, the reasoning man, the Son of man.

We are driven, then, to this conclusion, that the Scriptural motive for the making of life is the value of life itself and not anything that life may do. The purpose revealed in the Bible is production and reproduction with a view to the emergence of the perfect form. It is for this that the children of Israel are isolated. It is for this that the nations of Canaan are exterminated. It is for this that the prohibitory laws are uttered against intercourse with the neighbouring tribes. It is for this that there is conceived the design of constituting a peculiar people holding themselves aloof from other peoples. The aim of the God of Israel is natural selection—the selection of those whose union will best promote the welfare of posterity. His object is to constitute a future race—to multiply the good forms, to replenish the wastes of being. To fashion this coming race he spares no labour. “Let us make man” is the keynote of all His care. It is the man of the future he contemplates—the coming man. He seeks to make that coming glorious. He selects the fairest specimens to contract the marriage tie. He isolates them from all beside. He bars out the Amalekite and the Moabite. He destroys the Cities of the Plain. He shuts the door on luxurious Babylon. Whatever will corrupt, whatever will corrode, whatever will enervate, whatever will tend to weaken the coming product, is feared and therefore forbidden. Nothing which is not in the Book of Life, nothing which is not essential to the character of life, is desired to have part or lot in the propagation of the future kingdom.

Now, whether I am right or wrong in making this the purpose of God as revealed in Scripture, there is no doubt at all of the fact that it is the order pursued by the principle of Evolution in Nature. I do not say it is the *purpose* of

Evolution in Nature. I have no right, in the meantime, to assume that Evolution has a purpose. I keep purely to matters of fact. But looking merely at the fact, it is quite patent that the order pursued by Evolution is the very order attributed to God in the Bible. The system of Evolution is confessedly a system of selection. It is a system by which certain forms are chosen to diffuse the fountain of life. You may say, if you will, that these forms are chosen by individual lives—not by the Author of Nature. We are not at present disputing that point. We keep to the simple fact which is admitted, nay, strenuously insisted on, by every man of science in the world—that Evolution selects forms for the diffusion of the vital stream. The motto of every biologist is, "The survival of the fittest." That motto is not a theory; it is a fact, known and read of all men. It states that, explain it as you will, Nature is picking out those forms most eligible for permanence, is making a choice of those types of being which are best calculated to ensure the continuance of the mundane system. Now, the question is, What is this choice of the eligible? does it or does it not involve the action of a Divine Will? I am not disposed to say that all selection implies will. I think there is such a thing in Nature as involuntary selection; how otherwise explain magnetic attraction or chemical affinity! The simple question is, Is *this* an involuntary selection? Is there anything about it which distinguishes it from a mere mechanical choice—from the magnetic, from the chemical, even from the animal? Does it contain an element which lifts it above common physical attraction, above unconscious instinct? Does it, in short, bear the stamp of intelligence, the mark of rational thought? On the answer which we give to this enquiry will rest the determination of the problem whether the selective Force of Nature is a blind power or the agency of a designing Spirit.

Now, there is one element in the selections of Nature

which I hold to be incompatible either with mere mechanism or with mere unconscious instinct; it is the fact of progress.¹ Let us suppose you had a dream one night that you were living almost at the beginning of time. The original germs of life had already been created; and you were asked to predict what would be the nature of their posterity. You might come to one or other of three conclusions. You might say either that there would be an advance, that there would be a decline, or that there would be a continuance in the state of the first parents. Which of these alternatives would you adopt as your prophecy? Remember, you are to suppose that in this dream you had no perception of anything beyond mechanism and instinct—that Man was not yet created and that God was not yet seen. I repeat, what on this supposition would be your choice of possible alternatives? The answer cannot be doubtful; you would pronounce the decline probable, the continuance conceivable, and the advance impossible. To you the most likely of all things would be that the life in the first germ would in the act of transmission gradually disappear. You might admit as a possibility that it had a chance of retaining its present strength; but by no possibility could you admit the chance of its transcending its first conditions and rising into heights of glory.

And in this dream of yours you would be logically correct. Imagine a ball set in motion at the opening of three roads. The first road, I will say, is level; the second slopes down; the third ascends. On which of these lies the likelihood of the ball's movement? On the downward way the chance of the ball is superlative; on the level way it is comparative; on the ascending way it is nil. If, now, in spite of these prognostications, you found at the top of the ascending road

¹ Shall I be reminded that Mr. Spencer professes to derive all existing progress from the persistence of force. He does; but, with him, the force which persists is that infinite and eternal Force which he calls the Unknowable.

that ball which half an hour ago you had seen at the foot, what would your conclusion be? Simply that some force had been imparted to the ball additional to its own force. That is exactly your position subsequent to the dream. When you awake, you find that, of the three roads in your vision, the ball of Evolution has taken the impossible one. You find that the heredity, instead of going down or remaining stationary, has gone up. It would have been no wonder that the original life should have been attracted by kindred elements; it would have been no wonder that in the struggle for existence it should have been driven back to elements beneath it; but that it should have risen to a height beyond it, that it should have been attracted by influences dwelling on a higher plane—this seems nothing less than an achievement of the impossible.

It is to explain this achievement that we call in the hypothesis of a Divine Will. We cannot account for the ball going up the hill *as* a ball, on the strength of its own rolling; we are obliged to assume that it has been propelled. That which impresses me as the Divine side of Evolution is not the variety of species, but the ascent of species. My need for a selective Intelligence does not arise from the multiplicity, but from the progressiveness of the structures. There might be endless multiplicity without the slightest progress, nay, alongside of degeneration. The striking feature of Evolution as it appears in our system is its upwardness. It steadily ascends the hill. We see no *physical* reason why it should ascend. So far as mechanism is concerned, it would be more natural either to move on the plain or to descend into the valley. But *our* Evolution goes up. It has moments of stagnation, it has seasons of retrogression, but these only show what it *might* have been, what, on mere physical principles, it *must* have been. Its aggregate march has been an ascent which nothing has permanently impeded. It has passed in

the heavens from the misty fire-cloud to the majestic field of stars ; it has advanced on the earth from the mollusc to the man. It is not too much to say that Evolution, as we know it, is itself an inversion of the natural order of things.

Is there any way of evading the inference that this inversion of the natural order is the evidence of a higher Will ? It is averred that there is. We are reminded that the principle of Evolution is the survival of the fittest. It is said : Does not this principle itself affirm that mere unguided Nature has an inherent power of progress ! Does not the survival of the fittest imply the gradual improvement of communities ! If there is a provision in Nature for the weeding out of lives unfitted to their environment, if there is a mechanism at work by which the best adapted to any age or clime come to the front and bear the sceptre, have we not already a natural explanation of the upward development of species ! Is there any need to evoke the aid of a Divine Will to account for that which seems to admit of a worldly solution !

But *does* the world supply the solution ? does the survival of the fittest supply the solution ? I think not ; I am sure not. The survival of the fittest will not account for the advance of either the animal or the man. For consider, there is no reason in the world why the fittest to survive in any age or clime should be the best in that age or clime. Remember, I use the word "best" not merely in a moral sense. I say there is no reason why the fittest to survive should be the most organically or mentally perfect. I admit they must be the most capable ; but for any particular period, the more perfect may be the least capable, and therefore, from the worldly side, the least eligible. Let me explain what I mean.

Imagine that to-day there were to take place a sudden catastrophe. Suppose that, without destroying life, this earth were all at once to be wheeled back into darkness.

Suppose that the darkness were absolute, hiding equally sun and star, and that no materials were within reach for creating artificial light. In this case two classes would enter upon the new world. There would first, in a large majority, be those who still possessed the capacity for sight, though they could not use it; and there would secondly be that small residuum consisting of those who had never possessed the sense of sight, and to whom the catastrophe had brought no personal change. The circumstances of both classes would be the same; the condition of each would be a state of darkness. The difference would lie in the fact that the majority would be more perfect than the minority, inasmuch as they were in possession of an additional faculty which in other circumstances they might have used.

But now, for the service of this new world, which of these two classes would be the more capable? Clearly the minority—the less perfect, the originally blind. They would be more capable by reason of their imperfection. They would be more fitted to survive. They would be more at home in the dark. They would be more accustomed to sightless locomotion. They would be more alive to impressions of touch. They would be more alert in hearing. They would be better able to serve their fellows, and so better able to win their bread. They would, at the outset, be the more eligible for marriage. The only chance for the majority would be to lose their original perfection—to drop the memory of sight, and, like the fish in the Cave of Kentucky, resort to a lower mode of subsistence.

Do not think there is anything extravagant in such a simile; it can be paralleled in experience. In point of fact the five senses did not dawn simultaneously on the creatures. They came as special gifts to special individuals—the lower gifts first, then the higher. In their first coming the higher must have conferred great disadvantage.

The few who first received an eye were naturally made unfit for survival. By "naturally" I mean "according to all physical principles"; that it has not been so is the point to be explained. The earliest coming of any gift, physical, intellectual or moral, is for the life to which it comes a present disqualification in the race for existence. The first man must have been unfit for his environment—unfit by reason of his comparative greatness. His rational power would weaken his instinct, while yet not strong enough to be itself a guide. He would be outrun by his inferiors, eclipsed by the creation on the lower steps of the stair. Nature, left to herself, would have destroyed her every new product ere it had time to grow. Morality would have been no exception. Has not man himself discerned the fact that the advent of goodness would be the advent of tragedy! Has not Plato told us that the perfect man, whenever he came, would have the greatest reputation for wrong-doing! Has not a writer, in another land than Plato's and reared under influences alien to his philosophy, yet concurred with him in the sentiment that the perfect man, when he appeared, would be "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"! Has not Christianity professed to have realized that prophecy, to have exhibited in actual history the unfitness of the Son of God for survival in the race with animal life! And has not Prof. Huxley, the great apostle of Evolution, put, long centuries after, his imprimatur on the testimony by declaring that physical Nature makes no provision for the sacrificial life in Man.

Now, in spite of all these drawbacks, Evolution has ascended the hill. Each new faculty has in turn become dominant; each new species has in turn led the way. Man has become supreme among the denizens of earth; *moral* Man has borne the supremacy over all. What is the conclusion we derive from this? Can there be any but

one! If that has been done in Nature for which Nature is insufficient, is it not clear that there must be at work another agency, a higher agency, a voluntary agency! If a result has been effected for which physical selection will not account, for which sexual selection will not account—if that has been achieved which neither magnetic attraction nor chemical affinity can explain—are we not driven to the supposition that, beside these forces and within these forces, there abides the action of an intelligent Will!

And we are confirmed in this view by the fact that, at the end of its long line, Evolution itself has worked out an individual will. The latest stage of development is a designing mind, a power of conscious deliberation. I have always thought this the very strongest evidence for the existence of volition in Nature. It has been quite customary to say that the doctrine of Evolution has destroyed the force of the argument from design. We are told we can no longer say that the eye was made for light or the ear for sound, because light and sound have been recognised as simply the necessary results of eye and ear. But to me the stronghold of the argument from design has never been the adaptation of eye and ear. It has been something which the doctrine of Evolution can neither give nor take away—a matter of fact. That fact is the emergence of the *idea* of design in the latest fruit of the tree. If that idea had come early and had then passed away, I should not have been impressed with it. If the insect had possessed a will and the man an instinct, I should have been disposed to conclude, if I could have concluded anything, that will is *not* at the centre of the universe; and this would have been my impression irrespective of any testimony from the eye or the ear. The fact that will was the earlier, and instinct the later, product would have strongly suggested the inference that the principle of Nature is impersonal. But when in the order of Nature I see instinct early and personality late, when I

behold an intelligent will as the final product of the tree, when I discover the idea of deliberate design first emerging in the most developed of the creatures—what else can I do but conclude that Nature is animated by a living Will! The true test of a thing's character is not its spring but its autumn, not its morning but its afternoon. Nature's afternoon is Man; its ripest fruit is Personality. So far as Evolution has advanced, the formation of a personal will has been its ideal, its purpose, its artistic plan. In the light of that fact how can any one affirm that Evolution has weakened the evidence from design!

It is, then, to the sphere of human consciousness that I look for the re-establishment of a Natural Theology. I do not, indeed, disparage the old methods; I do not say that Evolution has rendered untenable the ground taken by Paley and the Bridgewater Treatises. But I think the stronghold of the design argument is not and never was the adaptations of Nature. We should not have seen design *outside* if the *idea* of design had not been already in the soul. Take, then, your start from the idea in the soul; it is the basis, it is the foundation, of all. When you are asked, Is there design in Nature? you can answer, Unquestionably, for I am a *part* of Nature, and there is design in *me*! You can say: "Not only is there design in Nature, but the latest phase of Nature *culminates* in design—*conscious* design. I am the latest phase, the last result of the material environment; and in me design has become a conscious process—the process by which I earn my bread, by which I build my houses, by which I form my society." In so saying you are formulating an argument as strong as it is true. You are asserting that design is likely to have been a preliminary idea simply because it has not been a primitive idea. The thought of it has dawned only at evening time. It has been the latest of all revelations—later than mechanism, later than animal instinct, later

than primitive man. It has been the product of the ripest culture. Is it not reasonable to conclude that the final seed dictated the original sowing and to say with scientific reverence, "That which is last has also been first" !

G. MATHESON.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

IV.

IMMORTALITY IN MODERN THEOLOGY.

IN earlier papers I have proved that the phrase *the soul immortal* and the doctrine of the endless permanence of all human souls are altogether alien to the phrase and thought of the Bible ; and that they crept into the Christian Church in the latter part of the second century, under the influence of Plato. We shall now consider how this subject has been treated by representative modern theologians. In this paper I shall reproduce the teaching of certain writers who accept, or do not definitely and conspicuously reject, the immortality of the soul.

My first reference shall be to an excellent work well known in all Protestant Churches and nations, the *Christian Dogmatics* of Dr. Van Oosterzee.

In §§ 66-71 the writer discusses "Man's original nature." But he nowhere asserts the endless permanence of the soul. On the contrary, he says in § 68. 4, "Of the *soul* we know too little to find, by an appeal to its constitution, sufficient ground for our demonstration ; we cannot even represent to ourselves this soul, or its independent continuance separated from the bodily life ; and the uncertain can hardly be proved by the unknown. Throughout § 68 he speaks of "the hope of immortality" and of "the immortality of man." This last phrase he defines to mean "not merely the continuance of life, but also of the sense