

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)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

Review.

THE RELIGIOUS HYPOTHESIS: "A Faith that Enquires."
 Gifford Lectures, 1920-21. By Prof. Sir H. JONES, F.B.A.
 Macmillan, 18/-.

BENEATH that somewhat common piece of cynicism that says "Language is given us to conceal our thoughts" there lurks a little truth, for the written language of books does frequently conceal the real mind of an author from his readers. The printed page reveals his conclusions, the results of his thinking, but the mental life of which they are the fruit is unexpressed. If this be the rule then is *A Faith that Enquires* an exceptional volume. Partly, perhaps, because the form in which these Gifford Lectures were delivered is retained in print, but more because Professor Jones' philosophy was a *working* creed, a faith that was operative in his life, this final work of his creates an impression on the reader of immediate intercourse with another mind. The personality behind the pen cannot be hidden.

It would not be true to say that Professor Jones underestimated the worth of results or despised conclusions, but certainly philosophy was to him pre-eminently the *pursuit* of truth. And while there are many aspects of the professor's character that his former students will recall—the humour that flashed in his illustrations, his eagerness to state an opponent's case at its strongest before the process of demolition should begin, and, with this last, his intolerance of slipshod theories that seemed to him unworthy of a thinker,—yet it is his emphasis on the greatness of this enterprise of thinking that is one pupil's most vivid memory. When the session's work had ended he would often sum up the lessons of the course in one illustration. He compared himself to a tug whose humble task it was to lead great liners to the river's mouth, leaving them there to face the open seas. The class was only the beginning of Philosophy, and no wish was nearer to Jones' heart than that his students should continue to be adventurous in thought, never dreaming of the Great Refusal—the refusal to think. He counted them all "the partners of his ethical enquiries."

The need for enquiry was the lesson of his class-lectures,

and the need for a spirit of research in religion is the topic of these Gifford Lectures. In the preliminary chapters certain general objectives to the spirit of enquiry are stated and discussed. It may seem to some that the arguments here lose in value because there is no direct criticism of the most recent wave of anti-intellectualist philosophy which treats the cognitive function from a purely biological point of view or opposes ethics and metaphysics as products of rationalisation and remote from the real life of impulse. But the examination of Carlyle's view of thought and the discussion of the appeal from Reason to Values sufficiently determine Professor Jones' position in the controversy. As later chapters show he believed Morality to be typical of man at his best, and not an unnatural artificial imposition, and he asserts that no action can be called moral unless it is intelligently directed.

But the first concern of the book is to meet those objections to reason that the religious man has raised. Apart altogether from general scepticism as to the efficacy of the intellectual method, there are special objections to its applications to religious problems, and the attitude of the church in the past has not been one of willingness to submit the articles of its faith to critical enquiry. Some of his readers will undoubtedly question the present appositeness of Professor Jones' statement that "Theology has its face turned towards the past"; to them it will seem an exaggeration to say that for the church "fettered-thinking" still means "devoutness." Yet there are few who do not need to be reminded of this need for free enquiry, not only for tolerance of the investigations of others but for intellectual enterprise in their own lives. It is, as Professor Jones clearly shows, a fundamental requirement for Protestantism, for Protestantism "has appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar it must go. It has affirmed the right of private judgment in religion, it must establish that right, and satisfy the intelligence."

Nevertheless there is one important argument that is a weapon in the hand of them who dispute this need. For the difference between the Sacred and the Secular, between religious and natural facts seems so definite and decisive that the methods by which the latter are studied may well seem useless for investigation of the former. While our knowledge of the finite increases through the use of enquiry it seems that Reason cannot help us to a belief in those infinite and absolute facts to whose reality the history of religion testifies. Our author's whole case depends on his demonstration that Reason is of service to the study of the infinite, and his arguments are worthy of being repeated in some detail.

In the first place the contrast between sacred and secular is not denied; rather it is admitted that its significance

will gain in intensity as mankind advances. But is this contrast is the last word one of two views must follow. Either the sacred is unknowable and we have no means of becoming acquainted with the infinite, or there is a dualism in man's cognitive nature, a fundamental division between the head and the heart. There have been pious scientists who have adopted the former alternative and confessed to a religion based on Awe before the Unknowable, but such a position is untenable. The conception of such a Deity is a masterpiece of confused thinking for we have no more right to call the Unknowable "God" than to give it any other name. But the second alternative has its own difficulties. The long-continued conflict between Science and Religion results for this belief that "the heart has its reasons which the head cannot know" and there are many who have felt that in this conflict Religion is always fighting a losing battle.

Further, there are certain positive considerations that lead us to doubt the ultimacy of this contrast between sacred and secular, and to believe that Reason can speak with authority of both realms.

In all other matters contrast always presupposes unity, and the assertion of differences implies an underlying identity. Paraphrasing Jones' argument we may say that it is only in conundrums that we ask what is the difference between objects that seem completely unrelated—and even in this case the answer to the riddle is the demonstration of some unsuspected resemblance as much as of a difference. In everyday life there is always a "universe of discourse" within which distinctions are made, and we are dealing with abstractions though they be legitimate for practical purposes—when we neglect this unity. So the sacred and the secular have their real meaning only in a wider whole; "Spirit" as opposed to "Matter" is unreal, and the true significance of "Matter" is found in "Spirit." Thus Jones declares that the merely religious and the merely secular are "poverty-stricken abstractions."

But we must guard against a misunderstanding. So long as man is content to contrast the spiritual and the natural, sharing his life between them, this deeper unity must be asserted. Yet if they are exclusive as is commonly supposed, then the underlying unity can only be one that is "beyond good and evil." Now this is far from Professor Jones' meaning, and to understand him we must realize that he denies the exclusiveness of the contrast. On the contrary, he describes the contrast as the difference between the infinite and the finite, and if the former is to retain its character it must *include* the finite within itself. Thus the opposition

is one between a point of view that comprehends the whole and one that is absorbed in contemplation of the parts in their isolation. Religion in short is a synoptic point of view,—not idle nor alive, but active as all true creeds are active, transmuting the value of particulars concentrating man's faculties and giving unity to the scattered facts of everyday life. The sacred is the true significance of the secular.

In the third place the spiritual, so regarded, is not intrinsically hostile to Reason. It is a narrow and unworthy view that looks on man's intelligence as a ready reckoner whose data must be units, fragments of life. Even in the natural sciences the quantitative method has its limitations. There indeed we have an example of different types of facts that demand different methods of knowledge,—for the hypotheses that serve the physicist are inadequate for the biologist—yet it is one reason that is used in every science. At bottom there is only one way of knowing, and that is the discovery of intelligible principles in widely differing events. The scientist goes out to meet his world in the faith that it is there to be understood. The religious man must go forth to meet it in the faith that the intelligible principle, the form that orders and systematizes events is a principle of goodness, and in this enterprise his equipment is the same reason that has enabled science to advance in the past.

There can, I think, be no denial of the importance of such a view. We have too long sought for "the spiritual" in some little hidden shrine within a man and have known the bitterness of defeat as the light of science has illumined one by one the dark corners of man's being. We have remained too long content with a mere juxtaposition of the spiritual and the natural: they have stood side by side like Sunday and week-day and the unity of life has been lost. To advance on these old views and justify the importance of religion in the whole of life we must accept the hypothesis that the spiritual is the natural rightly understood, and put the hypothesis to the test. For an hypothesis Jones acknowledges it to be. We are only learning the nature of the laws of our world, moral and natural alike, and none of them can escape the test of the crucial instance. No exception can be made in the case of the great presupposition of religion that there is "no fundamental discrepancy between the good and the real or the true," but this too must be justified in the light of secular experience.

A Faith that Enquires is an experiment in the laboratory of religion as well as an apologia for the scientific method, and indeed the greater part of the book is devoted to the trial of the hypothesis. Professor Jones enquires as to the stability of his faith in view of three facts—(1) the insistent

fact of evil, (2) the apparent contradiction between the claims of morality and those of religion, and (3) the difficulty of reconciling progress and perfection or of conceiving a perfect God as active.

I. The intelligence testifies with no uncertain voice to the reality of sin and suffering, even of the suffering of innocent for guilty. Can we still say that goodness is the foundational principle of reality?

We need look for no idle boast that this ancient problem has at last been solved. In many of its pronouncements Natural Religion has shown that it too has its dogmatisms no less confidently asserted than these of Orthodox Faith, but Professor Jones was too sincere in his recognition of the difficulties to be satisfied with a blind if easy optimism. He condemned as "facile solutions" that could satisfy no scientific spirit those theories that offer the conception of a God limited in power or goodness, or of a god "careful of the type" but "careless of the single life." "The religious history of man gives no ground for believing that he *consciously* worships a *recognized* imperfect God." No less certain is his rejection of those views that deny the reality of evil, for such theories find difficulty in maintaining the reality of the good. Goodness and evil alike are regarded as appearances, predicates applicable of temporal existences but not of the absolute. For Jones on the other hand the Absolute must itself sustain finite appearances and be "a doer and sufferer in the world's life." In his earlier works Professor Jones often emphasized the fact that the greatest tragedies of life are the result of the conflict not between good and evil but between two goods. But in this volume he strikes a deeper note. The great problem of the Book of Job, which often formed the subject of essays set for his students, is here forcibly restated, and the stark evil of evil is exposed.

But some contribution to an answer is offered. In the first place it is shown that the real problem is not occasioned by natural evil. No man was better acquainted with physical suffering than Professor Jones for his last years were deeply streaked with agonizing pain, yet his assurance is fine that natural evil may be no hindrance to moral good. The great problem is that of moral evil, for this is *final*. In the second place, however, it is pointed out that the character of all evil is *self-destructive*, it is negative at its own heart. Again the possibility of moral evil is recognized to be a condition of goodness, and it is Professor Jones' belief that the world exists to furnish mankind with an opportunity for learning goodness, while to demand a world in which wrongdoing is not possible is irrational. Finally it is suggested

that our hypothesis cannot stand unshaken in view of the tragedies of human failure unless personal immortality be assured.

The remaining two problems are far too frequently ignored to-day, at least in their practical issues, and the discussion of them in these pages is a great stimulant to thought. But it is also fruitful in results and perhaps the most valuable section of the volume. The suggested view of the relation between the sacred and the secular leads naturally to an identification of human nature at its noblest and highest with the divine. But this appears to involve the nullification of morality. Even if the identification be not recognized, at least religion insists on man's dependence on God while Morality on the other hand declares that the man himself must will the good. How are dependence and freedom to be reconciled; how is man's individuality as a moral being to be guaranteed if in religion he can say, "I can do all things *through Christ* which strengtheneth me"? The central point in Professor Jones' answer is that Personality does not mean mere isolation and that while every individual must live his life alone yet his personality grows as it becomes comprehensive. The unity between God and man is a unity of love—"that which unites wills and leaves them standing."

The practical importance of this teaching needs no elaboration, for frequent attempts are made to-day to divorce the ethical and the religious. From the side of the churches these attempts generally depend on a ready acceptance of recent psychological theories, and take the form of a protest against the degradation of religion to a mere means. It is *not*, we are told, the handmaid of morality: it is *not* concerned first of all with the improvement of mankind, it is the outcome of a wild necessity of the soul of man. Many and varied are the tunes played on these strings, but the central doctrine is the substitution of Worship for Service as the essence of Religion. As a corrective this has its value, but it leads all too easily to a depreciation of Deity, which is regarded not as the "stern daughter of the voice of God," but as the offspring of human intellectualism. The argument in *A Faith that Enquires* recalls us to a sense of the practical and to a recognition of personal responsibility.

We have noticed Professor Jones' doctrine that the Absolute is active in the world's life. Any other conception of the divine involves the isolation of the Good from the temporal process, and so a denial of the reality of that process, for by our hypothesis the Good and the Real are one. These conceptions then must be rejected. "I cannot call that which does nothing—which for ever stands aloof from

the world process in 'eternal fixity—God," says our author. "Such a God could not at least be a God of Love, for love identifies the lover and the loved. Love cannot stand aloof; love lives in the life of its object and shares its fate."

But what can be meant by the Perfection of God if He advances in the process, if He progresses in the progress of the world? If we reject the "static Absolute" must we not deny its perfection? Within the world of human activity we can follow Professor Jones' argument without difficulty. There attainment and process are one. Morality is a process, yet it were untrue to say that moral goodness is not achieved. But for God there can, it would seem, be no further aim, no real advance if He is perfect. It is precisely this which Professor Jones contests for, he says, a world progressing would be more perfect than a fixed and static ideal. For him Reality is a process and the process is the operation of the ideal. It is idle to look for the ideal outside its operation, for always a thing is what it does. So we cannot distinguish between Ideal and Reality, and must say that the whole, in process, advances to real achievements, the Perfect breaks out into new Perfection. Jones accepts the conception of a growing God.

A paragraph from Professor Hobhouse's recent work on *The Rational Good* may illustrate this. He says, "We desire objects that satisfy us, and yet it seems to be a condition that they should point beyond themselves, and thus not wholly satisfy—a paradox which is resolved if we have the grounded confidence that what is *wholly* good breeds more good and more in unending sequence." Professor Hobhouse does not, like Professor Jones, identify God with Reality, and may speak of goodness growing while God remains unchanging. But because this implies the inactivity of the Deity, Professor Jones welcomes the other alternative. It is idle to deny the difficulties within his statement, but he has suggested a line of enquiry that may be profitable.

And the argument he offers is fully in keeping with the rest of the volume, for it restates, from one more aspect the message of the earlier chapters that the Infinite is not to be sought apart from the Finite, that Static Conceptions cannot truly express the character of Reality and that the noblest philosophy of life is itself a living philosophy, a faith that enquires.

IDRIS W. PHILLIPS.