

# 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 Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

## THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST:<sup>1</sup>

FOUR months ago a notable assemblage of the representatives of almost all branches of human knowledge gathered together in Cambridge from all parts of the civilised world to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Charles Darwin. It was a testimony to the universal appreciation of the changes in scientific and philosophical outlook which have taken place during the half-century that has elapsed since the publication of the *Origin of Species*, and consequent on that publication.

Darwin was the last of the great triad of Cambridge men who in three successive centuries have been leaders of progress in the world of thought, Bacon in the seventeenth, Newton in the eighteenth, Darwin in the nineteenth.

\* 300 years ago Bacon published his *de Sapientiâ Veterum*, and was engaged in the composition of the *Novum Organum*. From him the scholasticism, which had for centuries dominated the universities of Europe, received its death-blow. It was his ambition to recast the whole of human knowledge into a system founded on a basis of observation and experiment, whereby men would be delivered from those preconceptions and traditional hypotheses which had so long enslaved them, and would be led to seek the truth with a mind open to accept whatever conclusions can be established by a legitimate induction.

Newton, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, had by the publication of his *Principia* and other works

<sup>1</sup> Murtle Lecture delivered at Aberdeen Nov. 7, 1909.

## 2 PERSONAL RELIGION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST

advanced the construction of this new world of science. Pioneers in quest of truth had made discoveries in different departments of Nature, and these discoveries Newton extended, co-ordinated and unified both by experiment and deduction; establishing the universality of physical law throughout inorganic nature in all parts of the universe within human ken.

Darwin, by the study of a wide range of phenomena in the world of living beings, was led to formulate a concrete theory of organic evolution which is the foundation of modern biology. The principles underlying this theory have proved to be applicable in other directions, and the variety of sciences represented by the delegates at the centenary is an objective illustration of the area of knowledge affected by Darwin's great inductions and shows how inextricably linked together are all departments of thought, not only in the intellectual area, but also on the ethical, emotional and religious sides of human life. The same may be said of Darwin's two Cambridge predecessors, each of whom in turn, by introducing a new point of view, influenced the religious life of his time. Bacon's philosophy was a child of the reformation. The galaxy of persons upon whose work he built, Telesio, Ramus, Palissy, Galileo, had been regarded as heretics by the dominant Church; and his own teaching was viewed with suspicion by the Cambridge Platonists, while it was used by Hobbes as part of the ground of his philosophy. Newton worked in a calmer atmosphere; but though the victory of the Copernican theory over the obscurantism of both Rome and the Reformers was practically won before his day, yet, in spite of the reverential tone and teleological bias of his writings his orthodoxy was impugned by the heresy-hunters of his time. His religious philosophy, which shows traces, perhaps unwittingly, of the influence of Henry More, was

satirised by Leibniz and was an offence to the French mathematicians of a later age. Those of us who have watched the rise and progress of Darwin's theory remember how at its first promulgation it was denounced by some as a deadly heresy, while by others it was hailed as a means of deliverance from a bondage of superstition. In the calm which has succeeded the heat of controversy the implicates and limits of evolution have become better understood, and now this principle is recognised by men of almost every school of thought as a reasonable explanation of the co-ordination of phenomena not only in biology but in other sciences. Thus as a great unifying conception it can be put alongside the discoveries of Newton in the inorganic world ; but in another respect Darwinian evolution, like Newtonian attraction, is no ultimate explanation, but is in itself a phenomenon to be investigated. Evolution can only claim to be considered as a process, not as a self-acting power. It presupposes a power somewhere, and a potentiality on the part of its subjects to respond to that power, but it tells nothing of the nature of the power except that it works this way not that. The hypothesis is concerned with the relations between things and their behaviour under definite conditions. It postulates that certain changes take place by the action of the power, but it takes no account of the origin of the conditions under which they take place.

We whose education began in pre-Darwinian days were brought up believing in a cataclysmic cosmogony ; and few of you, who have lived in an atmosphere in which evolution is a commonplace, can realise the difficulty which beset us in becoming accustomed to the orientation of the new environment ; for the change of viewpoint altered the aspect of nearly every region of human thought. In some minds, as Bacon predicted, the discovery of a scheme

#### 4 PERSONAL RELIGION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST

of secondary causes filled the whole mental horizon, and left no chink through which to see anything beyond, and with many there was a tendency to throw all beliefs into the melting-pot. To one young friend who was thus disquieted, and who consulted Darwin as to what he ought to believe, the Sage replied that the ultimate problem of existence seemed to him to lie beyond the range of the human intellect, but he added this practical advice. "But man can do his duty."

I take this counsel of the great scientific teacher as a text. It appears simple, but it is the statement of a problem which grows in complexity the more it is studied. It is of the essence of this problem that each of us must work out its solution for himself, so I can only attempt to sketch in outline how this duty appears to an ordinary man, working among the problems of biology, but not professing to be either a philosopher or a metaphysician. I find myself to be an item in the scheme of nature, and have a part to play on the world's stage. I ought to do this as well as I can. I cannot divest myself of the sense of responsibility, but to whom am I responsible? In a sense to my fellows; but I have also a vague sense that I am related to some higher power. It is therefore the first part of my duty to learn what I can of my environment and of its history. I believe that I am the outcome of evolutionary processes; what can I learn of these and of their implicates? To go back to the beginning—concerning the origin of the Universe of which I am a part—Science tells me nothing, and speculation in the present state of knowledge is useless. As to the origin of life, in like manner, neither experiment nor observation has hitherto given the faintest clue. Guesses there are in plenty but knowledge none. The postulate of evolution with which we begin is that the primordial bearers of life, however they may have originated, consisted of elements

which were liable to vary in different ways (why, we do not know), and that these varieties were propagated in their descendants (how, we do not know). Even in the simplest of these evolutionary processes recent discoveries show that the necessary interactions must have been indescribably complex, and of their ultimate dynamical nature we have not the smallest conception. Surveying the final outcome of the whole process of terrestrial evolution as it appears in the world of to-day, we see that, from the beginning, through the countless ages since life appeared on the earth, organic nature has been moving harmoniously forward step by step from its primitive simplicity towards its present complex order, along a course which, to one who views the result after the event, seems to have been inevitable, but nowhere has it been apparent at any earlier stage what the future order is about to be. At every point in the evolution a perfect equilibrium appears to be associated with the condition of continuous change. No generation has played its part because it foresaw the outcoming result, yet that result is a self-consistent cosmos. This process is only intelligible to me on the hypothesis that behind it there is a continuing agent in whose thought all these actors and their several parts are perfectly present. To believe that all the countless myriads of centres of co-operation and co-ordination which have been required for this cosmos could have been originated and maintained by unintelligent force acting fortuitously makes an immensely greater strain upon faith than the alternative hypothesis.

We are sometimes led into fallacies by the misuse of terms. Laws of nature are often spoken of as if they were causal forces. A postulated law of continuity is said to forbid, compel, constrain this or that. Science knows nothing of such laws. She knows observed sequences, from the contemplation of which, by induction, hypotheses

are framed. Law is a symbol correlating facts which have been observed, an abstract by-product of our method of arranging phenomena, more or less diagrammatic rather than comprehensive. Law is the expression of faith that nature is self-consistent. Another phrase used in connexion with evolutionary process is also liable to cause confusion of thought. The unknown force premised to be unintelligent is called the world-order, but it seems to me that order is a condition inseparable from the ordered material in which it is realised and cannot precede the material as a determining force. It is a confusion of subject and object to identify the order with that which orders.

As an anatomist my daily work brings me continually in contact with evidences of this order that I can only understand on the hypothesis of purpose; indeed it is impossible to describe the phenomena with which I have to deal without using terms implying end. It is the fashion to treat teleology with scant courtesy, even Bacon labels it an idol of the cave; but I believe that it deserves more attention than it gets to-day. Perhaps this discredit is due to the apparent limitation of its purview by the name commonly given to it, the argument from design, leading to the notion that it is only concerned with concrete cases of adaptation such as those dealt with in the Bridgewater Treatises, whereas the proposition involved is that the sequences of evolution have been, from their inception, throughout the whole universe, co-ordinated to the production of the cosmos as a definite end. The induction is imperfect, because our knowledge is incomplete; but the range of facts upon which it is based extends to the horizon of human knowledge. It is said that on account of this imperfection we may be led to infer design in cases where with a wider knowledge the semblance would disappear; but this *argumentum ad ignorantiam* is of little force, for we

have no reason to infer that our knowledge, so far as it goes, is not in accordance with truth. It is also said that adaptation is not necessarily design but may be fortuitous, due to some casual coincidence; but, when throughout all nature that is accessible to examination we find the perfect co-operation of disparate forms of energy producing effects which are congruous with their environing circumstances, which are themselves the effects of other antecedents, and all apparently working together to a common end, it is legitimate, and to me seems inevitable, to infer that the ordering has been the product of a designing power whose will is causal of the whole evolution. The common objection to teleology is that it is anthropomorphic, and therefore a heresy, which has been styled by a recent writer the seventh and most deadly of deadly sins. There is a *ψευδοταπεινοφροσύνη* in the use of the term as a label of contempt. If the best in man be idealised, I know not how to conceive of a higher ideal. Man is the only agent known to us in the universe who can, at his will, modify or alter the arrangements of the cosmos. Human will is the only intelligent dynamic factor of which we have direct experience, so this is only an *argumentum ad hominem*, the attempt to disparage by the use of a nickname. When we seek from the author just quoted for light on the nature of human will we are referred to the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research.

Design, it is said, is the characteristic of a finite agent who finds difficulties and gets over them somehow, sometimes clumsily. This is not an objection to teleology in the abstract, but to the limited form of design that we find in man's work. It is based on the predicate that we know all the end that the designer had in view. If we do not, the objection is invalid, for in that case there can be no adequate criticism of method. I do not conceive of the designing power as being just strong enough to overcome the utmost

## 8 PERSONAL RELIGION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST

resistance of matter, but as being so related to matter that it cannot resist Him at all. I do not postulate the appearance of special purposive forces casually introduced for the production of particular ends. The government of Nature does not require supplemental estimates to supply deficiencies in its budget. There are no traces of arbitrary interferences amending mistakes made owing to want of foresight in the ordering of evolutionary processes, like the work of the clockmaker to whom Leibniz compared the God of Newton. What we find are not alterations of universal sequences, but changes in the disposition of bearers of the forces that fulfil these laws, alterations which are of the same order as those that the human will can make in the specific coefficients that indicate the amount of the participation of each part in universal modes of development. That some products of evolution appear to be imperfect has been urged as irreconcilable with the existence of ends in nature, but this implies that we have an infallible criterion whereby to determine what constitutes perfection. The fulfilment of the designed end is the one thing needful; the absolute perfection of each part in relation to ends which it is not required to serve is an irrelevance.

The notion of the existence of imperfection arises from looking on the lower forms of life from the museum standpoint, as if they were trial specimens made to be rejected, incidental products thrown off in the progress of advance towards a higher stage. This is an artificial view of nature. Each form has its place in the scheme, and were it the last in its series would be regarded as perfect for the filling of its niche. Nature does not present to us a linear progression; hence the difficulty experienced in classification. Neither is nature a passively ordered system of typical forms like a row of specimens in a museum. The type of the systematist

is an artefact, a product of abstraction. Rather does nature show us a countless living throng of individuals, each enjoying its own existence, helping, hindering, striving with its fellow and displaying endless and individual variety of characteristic traits. We miss this individuality in our study by our undue attention to the artificial method of abstraction of type characters and concentration on morphological features which we use for systematic purposes instead of regarding the whole living actuality. It is here that the standpoint of the anatomist differs from that of the morphologist, for our business is to consider the individual in its totality, and to ignore selective abstraction. But even the anatomist, if he confine himself to structure and ignores the play of function, sees but in part. We do not exhaust the significance of our subjects when we view them as actors dressed for the play if we ignore the play in which they take part. It may be that in the progress of evolution the natural order may be subject to an ultimate moral or spiritual order. Design is a theory of the guiding force; evolution is a metaphysical expression regarding its mode of action; survival of the fittest is a teleological conception.

But the problem before me has a higher import than that concerned with the material elements of the animal. I cannot refuse to believe that the great causal force behind nature is rational, for it is the source of the reason of humanity and of the intelligence of the most gifted men, even of such as the great triad to whom we have referred. The order of the All must include that of its parts. We do not give the universe its appearance of rationality by projecting our reason into it, but we are rational because we are in continual relation to a rationally constituted cosmos. We have to deal with a power to which as a source we must attribute the intellects of the Bacons, Newtons and Darwins of our race. "What if that power happen to be God?" To this

conclusion I find myself shut up by these and other lines of thought into which time prevents me entering now.

In reaching this conclusion I am passing beyond the bounds of science from whose data the existence of God can neither be demonstrated nor negated, but the evidence on which I depend is of the same order as that which we deem cogent in the ordinary affairs of life. We have no right to demand evidence of a different order from that which it is possible to obtain. We cannot help explaining to ourselves, in some way, how it is that from the study of ourselves in relation to nature there arise the impulses which compel us to pass in thought from the world of sense to the supersensuous region beyond science.

I am saved from the need of discussing a difficulty which confronts me here, as it was dealt with by Mr. Rashdall in a former Murtle Lecture. If there be such a first cause, the source of reason and intelligence, an impersonal intelligence is inconceivable; can we attribute to Him personality? Does not that necessarily imply limitation in the contrast between self and not-self? But it seems to me that this is only an apparent difficulty due to the imperfection of language. Selfhood is recognised by an act of ideation, not of contrast: self and not-self are not two notions each of which owes its content to its contrast with the other. Every self has the ground of the determination of its selfhood in the consciousness of the value it has before any contrast is made, indeed the discriminating thought in the contrast is guided by the certainty of self, which is prior to the relation, and causal of the contrast when it arises. We whose experience is fragmentary and progressive may require the force of the contrast to establish our personality, but that condition cannot affect the First Cause. Any such analytic process must be applied in this case with diffidence, for we, who know ourselves to be finite and con-

ditioned creatures, can only apprehend God in the form in which He chooses to allow us to discover Him, and it seems to me that He permits us to think of Him under the self-imposed conditioning of personality, because otherwise we could not think of Him at all.

If I believe that this great first cause is a personal intelligence who is purposeful, I am constrained to inquire, What is His purpose concerning the only free purposeful intelligences who are, as far as we know, the highest products of the evolutionary creation? and, in particular, what is His disposition towards me? On the discovery of this obviously depends the nature of my duty to Him. We and all our fellows, savage and civilised, recognise within ourselves some degree of moral consciousness, the worth of some feelings, the value of some duties, and the obligation to recognise the rights of others. Our faith in the persistence of these values is the essence of all religions.

Some modern authors question the existence of any reality underlying the human appreciation of God and of our relationship to Him. If there be no such reality at the back of those aspirations out of which religion has arisen, we have an unexampled and inexplicable condition, a universal desire which nature provides no means of satisfying. I have little belief in the cogency of arguments based on analogies of natural with spiritual phenomena, but there is one such which may serve as a suggestion towards, if not an actual illustration of, the truth. In the specialisation of structure which takes place in animal evolution new organs do not develop unless there is a function for them to discharge connected with a correlated external condition. For example, the lowest animals have no organs whereby to appreciate light, and are not sensitive to it except as a chemical stimulus. In those of a higher grade pigment spots appear which react with light; in

## 12 PERSONAL RELIGION OF AN EVOLUTIONIST

higher organisms a refractive apparatus develops and the eye becomes capable of appreciating form and colour. If the organisms of the lowest grade are sufficiently conscious to comprehend their environment, there can be among them no appreciation of light ; nevertheless light exists : in the second stage there is no recognition of form and colour, yet these conditions are present. The realities are there all along, but the appreciation progresses as the organ becomes capable of recognising it. The application of the parable is obvious.

Can we believe, in view of all that we have learned from our study of nature, that behind the highest and purest of our religious beliefs there is no reality, that they are, as many of those who profess to be authorities on comparative religion tell us, pure inventions, delusions of the non-critical intellect and delusions of the over-confident will ? Their contention seems to be :—thus and thus have these religious conceptions grown ; here is their method of elaboration, therefore there is no reality behind them. This is a conclusion that the premisses do not warrant. As a biologist I cannot but believe that every enlargement of human faculty has reference to actual external existence. Now in another department of anthropology those who have traced the development of human art lay it down as a canon that no race ever invented a pattern. Those used are, they tell us, all permutations and combinations of forms copied from nature ; yet those who deny to man the capacity of originating a design would have us believe that the highest religious and moral ideals are but human inventions with no reality behind them. That the stages of religious appreciation have been correlated with the progress of evolution in human capacity is historically demonstrable ; but it is more consistent with what we know of the course of evolution to believe that these emotions and feelings, which are far

more dynamic in the life of humanity than the concepts of the intellect, should be related to something in the character of God than that they should be baseless and unrelated. If life is to be intelligible, these, on account of their insistence and worth, must have their proper place in its scheme, and it seems to me impossible to regard them otherwise than as real approaches of worshippers to a real object of worship.

Doubtless this view that the experiences of the spiritual life are real, although, being immediate, they cannot be rationalised or included in any continuous system, will be stigmatised as mysticism, but I am not ashamed of the name. I cannot get away from mysticism in life. Every unselfish friendship, every affection, every enthusiasm is mystical. All real poetry, all ideals are mystical. Rob life of its mysticism and you take from it almost everything that gives it value. I pity the man to whom Browning's poem "Fears and Scruples" does not appeal with a sense of thrilling reality.

At this point, in seeking to learn my duty toward God I am confronted with the insoluble enigma which has been the puzzle of man since he began to think at all. If the world be framed and ruled by an infinitely powerful God, what about evil? why has it been permitted? can the power at the back of Nature be infinitely good? This was the problem which led Darwin to give up, as insoluble, any inquiry concerning the ultimate power behind nature. This is too large a subject upon which to enter now, but it is worth noting that there are here two questions, connected, but not identical: the first, relating to suffering in nature; the second, concerning sin and its consequences in man. In regard to the first, there is an element of false sentimentality in the way in which the cruelty of nature is depicted. Death is indeed the common lot of organic beings, but in any conceivable system of evolution working towards progress this

must be so ; to the lower creatures, who have no outlook beyond the present, there is little pain in it. We are apt, for polemical and sentimental purposes, to project our own self-consciousness into the lower animals and to speak as if they suffer as we suffer, but this we know from the structure of their nerve-centres is physiologically untrue. The impartial observer of nature, as far as it is unaffected by man, cannot fail to see that the amount of happiness which the lower animals enjoy immensely outweighs the suffering ; and the extinction of their life causes their companions neither regret nor remorse. Animated nature, as far as we can understand it, is aglow with pleasure.

It is in the case of man that the question of moral evil arises, for here on all sides we see misery, pain and wretchedness, innocent and guilty suffering alike, so that we are prone to despair of finding that goodness exists at the centre of nature. But, before we allow ourselves to be panic-stricken with the cumulative effect of this general view, we ought to analyse the phenomena and trace their elements to their sources. When we do so we find that much more than ninety-nine per cent. of the sorrows of humanity are due to conditions preventable by human effort and will. On the one side sloth, ignorance, evil passions, strong drink ; on the other side greed, selfishness, ambition, the exploitation of one class by another in the haste to be rich, are the responsible causes. (I speak that I know ; I have served as Poor Law Medical Officer in the poorest parts of the poorest city in the empire, and have lived among the people). Humanity possesses the terrible gift of free-will, and these are the penalties paid for the deliberate choice of the evil. As long as the life of the individuals who constituted the ancestry of man was that of the mere animal, a lowly developed self-consciousness was probably the centre of reference of sensations and volitions. The ends to which its

impulses were directed were those of the maintenance of the individual and of the species, and the norm of life did not rise above the fulfilment of the desires of the senses. In such a condition there was no responsibility, little but transient suffering and the actors were non-ethical. Where no law is there is no transgression. But when mankind in some way unknown and inexplicable in the present state of our knowledge attained the position at which his realities of self-consciousness had become characteristically unfolded, and his sense of responsibility awakened, when his powers of social organisation had become strengthened by his extended ability to communicate his thought to his fellows, when his emotional nature had become capable of realising the existence of a supreme Power, his relationship in respect of conduct in the presence of that Power was changed. Certain obligations, as far as he had become able to apprehend them, became an integral part of his consciousness. He must respect them or suffer for his failure to do so. There was set before him an end towards the attainment of which his whole life must be directed; that end is the advancement of humanity to its highest goal, and any defect of duty which interferes with his self-fulfilment becomes a sin against the divine order. The evolution ceases to be by natural selection and becomes purposive, the struggle being not with external nature but with the turmoil of passion within. By this discipline men can rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher planes of moral and spiritual life. Those who regard suffering as a reflexion on the moral character of God forget the elementary postulate that struggle is the condition on which evolution depends. We may imagine a universe in which, by Divine power, evil was non-existent and uprightness inevitable, but, so conditioned, man ceases to be a willing moral agent and becomes a plaster-cast saint to

whom all progress would be impossible. Man's personal conflict with these lower inherited tendencies, which in the animal were conative and non-moral, is needful if he is to realise the highest moral ideal. If on self-examination we are conscious that we have not striven with all our might for the conquest of evil, the spread of goodness, and the lightening of the burden of our fellows we have no right to throw the blame on God, for it is the wilful choice of these selfish desires that produces evil as its fruit and wrecks the happiness of the world. The alternative is set before every man, and before we impugn the righteousness of God let each one ask himself, What am I doing toward this consummation? Am I doing all I can to lighten the load of suffering and sin? Each man's duty is writ plain: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Nevertheless there are causes of suffering such as the catastrophes of nature which are beyond our control, but the sorrows they cause are not one-hundredth part as great as those whose incidence depends on human conduct. If we reflect how small a part of the plan of nature we know, we need not be surprised that there are here perplexities out of which we can see no way. The ascent from the animal to the man is tremendous and cannot be achieved without a colossal struggle. Even with the heritage of the moral growth of the past, should any seek to know why do men choose the evil rather than the good, let him interrogate his own past, and he will find that the determining factor is his own deliberate choice.

Man has, from the earliest time of which we have any knowledge, entertained some form of belief that to the great unknown Power he owes some duty or service, with its corollary that God is not indifferent to him nor can he be indifferent to God. Every race has, therefore, sought to find out God, and as mankind advanced in culture these

discoveries became crystallised into specific religious systems which were magical, ethical, or spiritual according to the trend of the respective racial dispositions. In the growth of these, the evolutionary processes by which they were moulded may generally be traced, their characters being conditioned by the environments of the race, while the theory and forms of ritual were, in general, the outcome of the spiritual insight of those who were the religious leaders in each people. But all through the ages the religious consciousness of humanity has been earnestly in quest of some response from God to the solicitous expectation of man, some revelation or immediate communication which would therefore be authoritative. Can God make such a response, whereby we may learn His purposes concerning us? We can do the like to one another, a man can communicate the expression of his will to his fellow, on what ground can we deny to God the power to do likewise to the creatures whom He has made if He so will? Is He as free from the restraint of an external determinism as any man who can cast a stone, light a fire or lift a child out of a pit? If not, He is not God; but if so, it is reasonable to believe that God may not only fulfil the universal desire of His creatures and make such a communication, but may, if He will, accompany the revelation by immediate phenomena which will arrest man's attention. To assert that such is impossible, that there can be no ultimate fact which can upset the stability of our outlook based on the hypothetical continuity of nature is a position which no theist can logically assume; for, in the first place, the hypothesis of continuity is only a postulate of experience which is limited, so, unless we make the assumption that the experience of ourselves, or of the majority of mankind, exhausts the possibilities of nature, we are arguing from the particular to the general. But, secondly, to assert such a limitation on the Divine

action is to predicate that there is a power above God to which He is subject which determines what He can and what He cannot do. On no other ground can we deny to Him the power to initiate new series of events not conditioned by those that preceded them whenever it pleases Him to do so for the fulfilment of His own ends.

The Christian doctrine is that God has given to man such a revelation in that he has become incarnate as Christ Jesus to teach man, as he could not otherwise be taught, God's attitude to men and man's duty to God and to his fellows. Such a doctrine lifts Christianity wholly out of the plane of evolution, and belief in it requires evidence that the character of the revelation is such as to compel our acceptance of it. To the impartial student Christ stands out as a unique personality, the highest ideal of moral and spiritual life of which humanity could conceive, and His teaching is unique in its comprehensiveness, its adaptation to the wants of man's nature, and its finality. Some of these teachings are truths that had been discovered by earlier seekers after God, but these He has raised to an immeasurably higher plane. The scheme of human life which He sets before us is on a level far above that to which any evolution could raise it, because He brings man into fellowship with God. Humanity has always felt some sense of sin, as is shown by the universality of sacrifice in worship, but nature appeared inexorable and unforgiving. This sense of sin is rendered incomparably more acute when we contrast ourselves in motive and life with His sinless holiness, notwithstanding which He has shown that, in spite of our failures, God in His infinite love is ready to receive and pardon the repentant sinner. With this elevation of character we get a new sense of our duties to one another. He teaches us that life fulfils itself in loving service to God and to our neighbour, that its requirements are purity of heart and motive,

sincerity, courage in striving for the right and disregard of the transitory ideals of this world, and by these He enables man, by the exercise of will reinforced by the impulse which He gives, to reduce the chaos of desires and purposes into conformity with a moral order in spite of inherited tendencies. Through Christ man is encouraged to hope eventually to attain to the highest weal in the complete coincidence of the highest good and the highest happiness, even though the way thereto may lie through pain. If we believe in the Incarnation, which is the greatest event it is possible to imagine, then the Virgin-Birth and the Resurrection are not only credible but appeal to our consciousness as the inevitable concomitants of an occurrence so transcendently important.

The discharge of duty implies effort: if we are to be helpful to our neighbour, we are bound to communicate to him the knowledge of the path of peace we have found ourselves. No man is doing his duty unless he is an active propagandist of the faith which is in him.

As the preparation of man for this revelation was a long evolutionary process, the ancient record of the education of humanity through the ages when men's notions were crude must of necessity include much that is legendary and unauthentic of which a judicious criticism will purge it. The review of that history of the universe and man shows that it began with an event, the primal creative impulse, which was immediate and not evolutionary, as it preceded the whole process. It is fitting, therefore, that the final act should be one which is also above the possibilities of evolution, and one which sheds a retrospective ray of light over the long panorama of the ages as it reveals the purpose underlying the whole process. It also sends an anticipatory beam forward into the future; for although it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet as Christ raises those who

follow Him into fellowship with Himself they have reason to hope that they shall be like Him; and every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.

A. MACALISTER.

*THE METHOD OF STUDYING THE PSALTER.*

WITH SPECIAL APPLICATION TO SOME OF THE MESSIANIC  
PSALMS.<sup>1</sup>

IN the lectures which I have been invited to give on this subject, there is naturally much with regard to the Psalms, which I must suppose to be understood and taken for granted. I cannot, for instance, describe the varied contents of the Psalter, or dwell upon its high devotional value, or explain, so far as we know them, the stages by which it gradually reached its present form. I shall only, by way of introduction, place before you a few things which we must bear in mind when we endeavour to arrive at what I conceive I was intended to help you to understand—the original meaning and purport of a few representative Psalms. I hope that the examples I shall take may place some of those who hear me in the way of applying the same method in other cases.

i. The foundation of all fruitful study of the Psalms, as of every other part of the Old Testament, is an exact translation—resting, of course, if possible, upon a sound knowledge of the original language. But even without this independent knowledge of the original language—which all are not able to obtain—a clear and exact translation is alone often enough to teach us much: it removes many

<sup>1</sup> Expanded from lectures delivered at a meeting of clergy in Oxford in July, 1908, and repeated, with some additions, at a Summer School of Theology held at Oxford in September, 1909.