

# 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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE VI.

## THE PRAYER OF CREATION.

BY THE REVEREND CLARENCE GREELEY, PH. D.

THE Prayer of Creation suggests the scope of Christianity. Man is God's image; Christ his "express image." That is the ideal view. But, in this workaday world, ideals seem to have a hard time. Modern science and the West Aryan nations teach us to look first to the earth for our deities, and to regard our tasks as quite fragmentary, modest, and terrestrial; that our little globe is, if not "*in den äussersten Zweigen*," nevertheless, spatially considered, only a relatively insignificant and "vanishing point" in the universe, and each of the countless stars we see, at best "only a ray by night." Man is variously termed a local incident in timeless evolution, a drop in the ocean, or a speck in space. Surely we have no commanding view. Is man the measure of the world? Can the Christ come out of Nazareth? Can individuality be universal?

But Paul's standpoint is spiritual rather than spatial. He is not geocentric, heliocentric, or Christocentric "after the flesh." Perhaps it is not too much to say, that for him the soul is the Bethlehem of the universe, in which God is born through creation's travail,—

"The mind is like the sky  
Than all it holds more vast, more high."

As Browning says, "This earth's no goal, but starting-point for man."

We are not attempting, in this article, so fruitless a task as the prediction of the final form of society. "It is now more than usually impossible to prophesy the future." No

cosmic theory is complete. The summit of creation is in the clouds. We are not trying "to reconceive the Christ." The prayer of the age is not for a new religion, but for the actual content of Christianity. Does Christ answer creation's prayer? Is Jesus Christ the proof of God? We simply insist on the Pauline thought, expressed also in Ephesians and Colossians, of the objective and cosmic significance of Christ,—on the obvious truth that Christianity, if the absolute religion, must answer the prayer of creation (Rom. viii. 19) for the perfection of the microcosm, man, whose will, as Dorner says, has a universal reference to nature; or, more concretely, the focus of art, science, politics, and the like is in the life of this, the perfect religion. The divinity in God, must be, at least, as large as the humanity in man.

This article has been suggested by the perusal of such statements as the following, of rather frequent occurrence, in religious literature: It ought to be no longer possible for Japanese, studying in London, to go home, and advise against the adoption of Christianity, because inferior to Buddhism in good works. We mean by a divine religion, one that satisfies the prayer of creation for completeness. We hope to show that Christianity is not, as Mr. Mill has called it, "a very imperfect system," if Christ, as Infinite Personality, is taken as the content of our faith; that is, as the answer to creation's prayer to find humanity complete in God,—that is, to find divinity in man.

1. What is meant by creation's prayer?—While scriptural statements are not in scientific form, and we cannot deduce the factual history of creation from a text, still the Socinian view that Paul refers in the eighth chapter of Romans to the "spiritual creation" alone is not in general the opinion of modern commentators such as Godet, Weiss, and Meyer,—there is no mere physical creation apart from spirit. Paul conceives of nature, the

physical creation, as sighing for man its natural lord and redeemer. According to Romans viii. 19-23, the prayer of creation is the prayer of Nature for the manifestation of personality in its perfection. In general the prayer of nature is for spirit. The apostle has the ideal view that even the prayer of nature is, germinally, the "Cry of the Human."

2. Is there an answer to creation's prayer?—Paul implies that there is. The "divine event" to which "creation moves" is not a mere poetic conception. God, immanent in the world, inspires the prayer and furnishes the answer.

In his optimistic thought of a golden age in the future, the apostle is reinforced by modern scientists. It is not meant that Paul had distinctly in mind the doctrine of modern evolution, any more than Shakespeare created Caliban to supply the missing link. But evolution is naturally teleological. Darwin makes the end of evolution the "rearing of the greatest number of individuals in full health and vigor, and with all their faculties perfect under the conditions to which they are subject." Mr. Spencer anticipates an age when human happiness will be perfect.

3. The answer to the prayer of creation is complete in cosmic personality—Christ. His individuality is in his universality. We need not be surprised that the apostle takes personality to be the world-goal. All the ages from mollusk up to mammal are summed up in the Age of Man. Said Godet, commenting on this passage, "The physiologist sees in human organization the goal and masterpiece of animal organization." According to the Epistle to Diognetus, Christians hold together the world itself.

"The sum of the world in soft miniature lies"

even in the tiniest infant. Christ as God's "express image"—perfect personality—must be the adequate response. "Perfect personality is in God only."

4. The content of Christianity, or the answer to

creation's prayer, is nothing less than Christ, or personality in its fullness,—individuality universal. Spirituality is not a barren thing; it is not a root out of dry ground; it is not without form and void. Said Professor Seth, "God cannot be less than we know ourselves to be"; and Mr. Spencer, "God may be more than personal, but not less."

The notion of a merely ideal, that is, "Docetic" or phantom, Christ; the asceticism and "cloister virtues" of the Middle Ages; the thought of Fate above Zeus; the tendency, in Arianism, to isolate God from man; the abstract universality of Brahma; the Gnostic heresy of a God so transcendent as to be utterly unknowable; and a mere pietistic theology, devoid of sociology,—all are different phases of a comparatively barren spiritualism,

"A gulf profound as that Serbonian bog  
Between Damietta and Mt. Casius old,  
Where armies old have sunk."

The thought of "otherworldliness" that worships a worldless God is not the "orthodoxy" for which creation prays, but simply atheism; for, *ipso facto*, a worldless God means a godless world. Said Jesus, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world." In him all fullness dwells. Nothing less than Christ is the content of Christianity.

5. Christianity means more than "salvation from sin" in the narrow sense. It has been said that denunciations of sin are more terrible in the Koran than in the New Testament. But what could suggest more-profoundly the sinfulness of sin than this very text in which Paul sets forth the prayer of creation: "The earnest expectation of the creation is waiting for the manifestation of sons of God"? The sinner is not himself, (Luke xv. 17,) not "saved," until he comes to himself, until he fulfills his idea—what he is called on to express in relation to the universe.

6. Nothing but complete personality can satisfy the desire of all nations, or even the prayer of a Euripides, for example, for the recognition of human life in its fullness,—life in its extensive universality. Because every human heart is human, therefore the perfect man alone satisfies the “yearnings, strivings, longings,” of the ages. Fetishism, nature-worship, polytheism, and monotheism seek, at least in part, the personal in the natural. This is the center of Buddhism, and is the motive in the Mazdean prayer to rise from the evil to the good creation. The aspiration of Rome for the divinity of law, and of Aristotle for the application of ethics to politics, is realized in a community of sons of God unfolding according to the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The prayer of the Middle Ages for shelter in an institution which is “absolute not vacillating, infinite not empty,” and in which our “fragmentary life with its inner sighing for perfection” is made complete, is answered only in that church whose ritual is the voice of God in history, whose cathedral is creation, and whose priest is that Infinite Personality in whom all fullness dwells. The birth and worth of personality at its best, as the issue of the groaning of untold ages, furnishes the only answer to the prayer of Æschylus for the key to the mystery of tragedy in life. The prayer of Proudhon for the emancipation of the proletariat is already answered in part by the transition from the study of abstract economics to that of the production of noble men and women and the systems that best develop souls. How can the aspiration of Rousseau (the first modern lover of nature *per se*), or Wordsworth and Cowper (the first to introduce the taste for natural scenery into poetry), be fulfilled, except as a spiritual presence is revealed in nature answering the prayer of Paul for the perfection of personality? The “interior longing of the Semitic soul,” and the aspiration of Plato, who asked, “Who can show us the Father?” are

satisfied in Christ only as he can say, He that hath seen me hath seen personality in its perfection. As the Æneid satisfies the Roman ideal of the national religious hero, so Paul's epic presents the Christ whom "all men seek" as the real hero of the whole creation.

"Father of all, in every age,  
In every land adored,  
By saint, by savage, and by sage,  
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord,"

"O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."

7. Christ answers the prayer of the individual soul, as well as the desire of all nations, for intensive universality. —The cosmic ideal is not too broad or vague for piety. It is only in Infinite Personality, Absolute Love, that the world has a truly sentimental basis; answering the prayer of Schelling and the other Romanticists, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, to find the laws of nature analogous to the human heart.

What is the Christ-need of the individual soul? What does it most deeply demand or desire? What is the scope or content of communion—of spirit meeting with Spirit? What is the personality, and what does its perfection mean? No human plummet can fathom the "abysmal depths of personality." But the aspects of personality commonly recognized, are the True, the Good, and the Beautiful—Science, Ethics, and Art. Yet these phases of personality have no reality except in relation to "creation itself." Man is the measure of the universe only as he is "anthropocosmic." The prayer of creation is the "cry of the human," in science, art, morals, and the like.

8. Take Science, the first—perhaps the most abstract—aspect of personality,—the longing for rational universality. The deepest desire of science is to see the ideal of the world. The ideal is revealed in Christ, the perfect man, "the regulative principle of the visible creation." Science sees,

Ethics strive after, Beauty realizes the ideal. Personality, or religion, is not complete without science. We may reverse Ruskin's thought: "the desire of the heart is also the light of the eyes." Perfect personality is cosmic: it must answer the prayer of the martyr Bruno for "light," as well as that of the martyr Stephen for "spirituality." The law of evolution, the most comprehensive scientific generalization (or impulse of the soul), demands the unity of man and nature, and their progressive spiritualization. Dorner finds this complete union of spirit and nature only in Christ. Spencer, as well as Paul, points to the ideal man as the summit of creation, and heir of the ages.

9. Take the Good, the second aspect of personality—striving to realize the thought of science that man is the goal of creation,—the longing for moral universality. Christ as perfect personality, the ideal man, is, *ipso facto*, the ethical world-goal, answering the prayer of Socrates for the union of the inner and outer; in modern language, for sanctification, character, love. In this sense the prayer of the age accords with the prayer of creation. If evolution is the great idea of the day, its legitimate goal is enthusiasm for humanity. If the nineteenth century is the age of machinery, perhaps the twentieth century will be the age of man. The trend of the age is toward the development, not alone of the "three estates," but of personality as such. Now we have histories of peoples; formerly we had chronicles of kings. The creation of states is a "small part of the task of civilized nations." The whole modern sociological movement is scarcely half a century old. The entire history of modern pedagogy from Comenius to such men as Pestalozzi and Froebel tends toward the demand for training for every human being because he is a human being. The wild prayer of the proletariat for the recognition of the laborer's personality is partly answered in the transition since 1848 from economics as a labor to a social



question, from the abstract "commercial man" (who never existed) to the content of life as a whole.

The prayer of theology to make the creed as large as the Infinite Personality of God in Christ is also a sign of this spirit of the times. The prayer of the age is for the development of man. Christ is its answer and ideal. That is, the ideal man's, the true man's, individuality is seen to be in his universality. This new hope is a Christian prayer, and was in the mind of him whom the Spirit of the Lord anointed to the content of religion rather than its mere form. And then, as now, occurred the birth-pangs of a new order ("all these things are the beginning of travail pains," Matt. xxiv. 8), in which man will be more like Christ, whose sense of *honor* even (nay especially) was vicarious (John x. 11, 12), resulting in the recognition of every human heart as human, and of the personality of the lowest man in "creation itself," as worth the toil and explaining the meaning of the "riddle of the painful earth" through the ages. If Christianity is divine, its morality is not less comprehensive than Spencerian ethics when defined as follows by Mr. Spencer: "The moral law is the law of the complete life, the law of the perfect man, the law of that state toward which creation tends."

10. Take the third and highest aspect of personality—and what is that? Art, the longing for æsthetic universality. It may sound strange to modern ears when we say that Beauty is not only an element in religion, but its very essence. Outside of Greece, Beauty has not been so recognized, in general,—certainly not by the Puritans. It is said that Calvin lived his life, even in Geneva itself, making no allusion to the lilies of the field.

But the desire of Beauty is deep in human nature. An instinct extending back to the Vedic hymns to the dawn,

"When Art was still Religion,"

and even to the arbors and lawns of the bower-birds; must

have an absolute foundation in personality. Freemantle says that the striving toward an ideal is a prayer. Beauty means the realization of the ideal. And Paul considers the whole universe as realizing the ideal for which creation prays. Orpheus is the educator even of nature herself. "The course of nature is the art of God." Christ answers the deep desire for Beauty. We know Beauty, perfection, complete incarnation, or God's "express image," only in Christ—the realization of the world's ideal. We know perfection only in Christ, not in nature's mechanism, as such—an abstraction. We know God only in Christ. Paul found Christ in his soul—then as the pattern of creation. Perhaps only he who has found Christ in the "Chapel of the Hermits" can say,

"Henceforth my heart shall sigh no more  
For olden time and holier shore."

If I insist on finding Christ in Political Economy it is because I have found him first in my soul. Beauty, immanence, the incarnation, Christ,—is the spiritual goal of the world. And so "a 'splendor of God' will have to unfold itself from the heart of these our industrial ages."

11. The longing for completeness is fulfilled in immortality.

" . . . the True, the Right, the Pure, the Just,  
Take the charm 'forever' from them, and they crumble into dust."

This is satisfied in Christ if he is Infinite Personality. Only as partaker of the divine nature is it true that "by man came also the resurrection of the dead." And since Jesus rose, not as God, but as man, man must be somewhat "divine." "In Him ye are complete" is the sum of all biblical anthropology."

12. If Christ is divine, his kingdom is comprehensive,—answers creation's prayer. No "cry of the human" is foreign to it. It will recognize "nature" and science. Because God is immanent in science, therefore it is truth,

and need not, as science be embarrassed by creeds theological or materialistic. But when we take a consistent, or Pauline, world-view, we see religion related to every atom of "creation itself." Religion needs to be true to nature and the scientific spirit. Paul looks on nature as "just the stuff" to "educate the man." If, in the seventeenth century, Harvard and Dartmouth had possessed the scientific spirit, perhaps they would not have taught Indians the classics, logic, and metaphysical theology.

We are not setting forth formally the sphere of the church,—its relation to philanthropic societies and all "who long and strive for the general good of mankind." But the Kingdom of Christ is comprehensive if he is divine. It is larger, not smaller, than the conception of Constantine, Charlemagne, Calvin, or in Augustine's City of God. It was not complete, as Hegel seemed to think(?), in the Prussian State in 1820. We do not assume to comprehend all of its vast and cosmic or manifoldly complex, obscure and microscopic, scientific, emotional, or volitional elements. But, "in so far only as what men call Christianity is accordant with the deepest rational, ethical, and æsthetic life of man, will it continue to win and hold the allegiance of the race." The prayer of creation may be more, but cannot be less than the "cry of the human."

Mr. Mill finds in nature "an inordinate desire for unity." If Christ meets the demands of the prayer of creation, which is "a striving toward the unity of man, the world, and God," then Christianity is not, what Mr. Mill has called it, "a very imperfect system." It does not take the name of God in vain. If Christ is creation's goal—if "the whole round earth," including the proletariat, the Chinese, the Indians, the Negroes, the "fallen," the outcast, the neglected, and the criminal classes (not merely the "three estates" or the cloisters of St. Basil or St. Benedict<sup>1</sup>), is

<sup>1</sup> Contrast Johnson's Rise of Christendom.

“bound by gold chains about the feet of God,” then “the history of the world, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is the true theodicy, the justification of God in history.”

As the comprehensive answer to the prayer of creation (natural and spiritual), and so only, Christ is the adequate proof or revelation of God. Then, in him are all the promises fulfilled. “Nothing, indeed, can be added to the facts of the gospel (as teaching that the true man’s individuality is in his universality), but all history and all nature is a commentary upon them.” “For how many soever be the voices of God, through him is the yea; wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us” (2 Cor. i. 20). The kingdom of heaven is as a seed. As the evidence for the law of evolution is the entire, progressive science of biology, so that of Infinite Personality is the unfolding of “creation itself,” culminating in that far-off kingdom, always germinally at hand, “closer than breathing,” but toward the far-off goal to which

“The whole creation moves.”

The progressive revelation in history, that is, in fact, of humanity well-pleasing to God, is a sufficient revelation (proof) of God well pleasing to humanity—answering creation’s prayer for scientific, ethical, æsthetic, spiritual satisfaction,—immortal life. Divinity in man is a proof of humanity in God. Christ reveals (proves) that God is love. We know God only in Christ (John i. 18).