

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 *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* can be found here:

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

SCHOLARS OR SAINTS ?

E. G. Ashby

In 1958 the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions, revolting against a 'limited culture dominated by the glory of Greece and the grandeur of Rome' expressed a wish for a curriculum which 'also reflects the importance of science in the mid-twentieth century'. This particular declaration may be accepted as the general tendency of our day and age. Science has come and come to stay, and whether we worship at its shrine or cynically regard it as the Sacred Cow, its influence is felt amongst all, in some more consciously than others.

The importance of this has been emphasized by Paul Tillich in his sermon on 'The shaking of the foundations'. Affirming that in the language of the prophets it is the Lord Who shakes the mountains and melts the rocks, he adds that this is a language modern man cannot understand. But God Who is not bound to any special language or group of men has spoken through the mouths of our greatest scientists and to this effect, that into the hands of scientists themselves has been placed the power to shake the foundations, to create or destroy, and theirs is the choice how they will use this power. In this way the moral problem is restated in new terms. Unless man learns some moral self-restraint and discipline he will destroy himself.

In the light of this it is easy to understand the concern of R. A. Butler concerning the effectiveness of the 1944 Act in respect of religious teaching in schools, and the relevance of the discussion of F. H. Hilliard in the *Daily Telegraph* (7.3.62) concerning 'Restoring Morals to the Curriculum'. Secular humanism is very much on the increase in many places, and Dr. Hilliard points out that such teachers would prefer a moral education divorced from religion. The argument is that this would minimize the danger of adolescents who found little time for religion throwing out the moral baby, so to speak, with the religious bath water. There may be a measure of truth here, but how much is it worth? During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were radical changes in belief and outlook but so far morality itself was unchallenged. As Rudolf Eucken stated it in his lectures in 1913, to them ethics was the 'pivot of Archimedes which gives stability to the whole of life', but, he added, 'in our days morality has ceased to be a matter of such unquestionable certainty'. Is it anything more than custom? What are its sanctions? The threat of nuclear destruction may enforce it as a matter of expediency, but is that all? Must we be good merely because the alternative is world destruction? Then if we can discard nuclear weapons will there be a fresh relapse into indifference to morality? Without a religious basis moral idealism may be little more than a Utopian myth. In fact is not the present attitude to morality the ultimate and inevitable result of a decline of true religion?

It is here that the Christian teacher comes into his own. As J. S. Haldane expressed it in his 1930 broadcast, 'The only ultimate reality is the spiritual or personal reality which we denote by the existence of God'. But it is here that the present generation are so sadly confused. Jacques Maritain has said, 'I like and respect contemporary youth, and I contemplate them with a strange feeling of anguish . . . they are just at that stage where the acquired structures of moral and religious tradition have been taken away . . . They stand in goodness upon nothing'. While reserving our judgments upon the measure of their goodness, many of us would feel how true it is that they stand 'upon nothing'.

Some enquiries concerning religious teaching in Schools were carried out in 1958 and records of these have been edited by Harold Loukes under the title of *Teenage Religion*. One problem raised was on the subject of belief in creation. The view was expressed that it could be true that God made the world, but 'it's not proved, is it? Nobody stood there and watched Him, so we don't know if He did it or not'. There are a number of confusions here, including the theological one seeing the personality of God as limited by forms of human personality and the logical one failing to differentiate different kinds of proof. Various views were expressed on both sides, but perhaps most important was the fact that the majority missed the realization that this is not merely an academic question but an immediate problem in which all are concerned, for the statement of the creation of the world by God is an affirmation of purpose, intention and meaning. The old problem of Science v. Religion is no longer very much with us, at least in its old form. But Science seems to have a technological value, it effects processes, it does things, it is factual, it counts, whereas Religion is so ineffective that it can be safely disregarded. This is probably a fair statement of how it appears to many.

Such conditions as these posit the need for basic Bible teaching. The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God—it assumes it, and demonstrates His activity in the lives and experiences of men. It is the only answer which makes sense of the Universe, for it is the fool who says in his heart, 'There is no god'. From the existence of God the creation follows as an act of faith (Heb. 11:3) and this is a meaningful act which affects each of us. From this beginning there is a revelation of the character of God, His holiness, majesty and power being balanced in true perspective by His mercy, grace and love. Through the Old Testament may be traced His activities in human history, His special covenant relationship with a chosen race, and the repercussions of this in their dealings with surrounding nations. The responsibilities of this covenant were enforced by the teaching of the prophets. These forceful challenges are taken up in the New Testament linked with a call to repentance and the acceptance of a new life bestowed by Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh. After effecting the work of redemption by His death, His resurrection and ascension made possible the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Acts show the continuation of the work Jesus began, and with the formation of the Christian Church we are already in our world. Though science has

opened many doors and revealed much of the processes of nature, the twentieth century, like the first, has for its supreme aim the making of new men, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, living in fellowship with God. This is the aim of religious teaching, not to make scholars but to create saints, and well informed ones at that. For Christ Himself and the Apostle Paul laid emphasis on the knowledge of God which is spiritual revelation and perception, and man is to love God with heart and *mind* as well as soul and strength. The knowledge of the text of the Bible is a means to an end, to lead to a knowledge of God Himself and the Saviour, and this is the meaning of eternal life. Each of us has his approach to life, however ill-informed the idea, so that we are hardly conscious of it at all. The Marxist, adapting the dialectic of Hegel, views the history of the human race as an economically determined system, the historical positivist thinks of it in terms of evolutionary and scientific principles. The Christian, too, has his *weltanschauung*, his 'world outlook', God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, He is now calling men to Himself to form His Church, and He will ultimately usher in His Kingdom. The aim of religious teaching is to make people aware of this, in the words of Paul, to 'make men see'. Thus far it is instruction, but with a moral and spiritual objective, to promote faith which will lead individuals into this personal relationship so that the Holy Spirit can transform their lives. The aim is, in short, not scholars, but saints.