

# 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 Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

are rarely admitted or introduced to our parochial spheres without the sacrifice of something or somebody better.

But enough! If we can help and encourage one another to deal wisely with the specific point of the recreations of the people we shall do well. I would appeal to my brethren in the ministry to think about it, for, as Archdeacon Wilson says in his Pastoral Lectures, "As pastors we are pastors of body and mind, therefore 'Nihil humani a te alienum puta.'"

And yet, I would pray my clerical brethren not to go to the mad extreme of condemnation, as if recreation were not a general necessity—nay, there need be nothing unchristian or irreligious in it. To discuss it, to meditate on it may frequently be for our good, as Bishop Paget says in his sermon on Phil. iv. 8: "The mind may well be busy in its leisure about any honourable strength or skill that can win men's praise: the doing well in any worthy and unselfish rivalry—it may be intellectual or it may be athletic. 'If there be any excellence, or if there be any praise, think on these things.'"

Nevertheless, let us do our duty boldly, attacking the evil that is marring the good, imbuing men more and more with the mind of Christ so that the fever state of recreation will die out naturally, and offering them something better than the best that they have ever had, and leading them gently to employ their powers in that kingdom and sphere which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.



### "*Ex Oriente Lux.*"

BY THE REV. G. E. WHITE, D.D.

THE present writer has neither the wish nor the wit to discuss the ruling criticism of the Old Testament, but the interpretation of those Scriptures of which our Lord said, "they are they that testify of Me," must be of perennial interest to Christians; and the recent remark of an earnest able critic,

"I don't believe we have got at the back of these things yet," may justify the publication of a leaf from personal experience.

It is my good fortune to have been for sixteen years a missionary in Turkey, and to have grown intimately acquainted with both the Mohammedans and the Eastern Christians of Asia Minor. Familiarity with Oriental modes of thought and speech casts a clearer light and a somewhat different colour over the pages of our dear old Bible. The divine message of redemption and revelation was communicated to us through an Oriental channel, and the interpreter should get as near as he can to the time and place, the standpoint and environment, the habits of thought and modes of utterance of those heroic figures who move amid the scenes of the Old Testament, and whose words are recorded for our spiritual doctrine and reproof. This point, of course, the exegetes try to reach, but they sometimes seem to carry with them into the sunrise realm the pragmatic, preconceived, up-to-date notions of the Anglo-Saxon scholar.

An apparent contradiction makes an Occidental uncomfortable, and he wants to attack it; it does not necessarily trouble an Oriental at all. The latter has more regard than he sometimes is credited with for the essential truth of a thing, but less than is sometimes demanded for the outer form. An Oriental does not feel bound to give a complete discussion of a principle, a full account of an event, or all the motives for an action. He does not always promise or undertake to tell all he knows. He states what is required for the purpose he has in hand, and does not concern himself further. He easily refers to the same event in such different terms that a listener has difficulty in recognizing it as the same. The speaker at one time emphasizes one aspect, or motive, or personality, and again something else is uppermost in his mind. Picturesque and excessive statements often take the place of precise accuracy. "I slept just two hours last night," means "I had a short night;" and, "I didn't sleep at all," means "I was wakeful." Nature maintains her types and species with wonderful persistence, yet she seems to separate them with flexible rather than hard and fast boundary lines, and

sometimes scientists hesitate whether to assign a specimen or a species to one side or the other of a line. Similarly, Orientals maintain their characteristic religious convictions and ceremonies with great tenacity, and yet the border lines are swinging curtains rather than ramparts of stone.

Kuenen, Wellhausen and their British pupils deal very freely in such phrases as “insuperable difficulties” and “irreconcilable contradictions.” Some of these are real and, perhaps, never will be solved, but an unexplained difficulty or discrepancy on the pages of the Old Testament would not require an Oriental necessarily to pronounce the writer either a fraud, a fool, or a double. At one time fear of an injured brother, at another the desire to contract a suitable marriage alliance, would naturally be put forward as the motive for the same journey. The naming of a place, once recounted, might naturally be repeated, when the narrative returns to that place, because of its importance, and without intending to connect the naming with the second visit.

My friend the white-turbaned *mufti*, the highest “spiritual” representative of Mohammedanism in our city and district, courteously allows me to listen while he receives a kneeling questioner who states a hard case for solution; the *mufti* then gives his official *fetva*, or judgment, as was done by Moses and his appointees in early Israel. Sexual subjects, questions of unpaid wages, and the shortcomings of Turkish officials, are among the topics on which interpretations are given on the basis of the canon law of Islam. I once heard the *mufti* in a sermon affirm that each of the seven prophets was endowed with a special sign. When I asked him to explain a little more fully in private, he readily did so, and named *eight* prophets and the sign of each. His homiletics are not hampered by too much arithmetic, but his main principles never swerve. He denounces official bribe-taking and corruption, irreligion among his people, and increasing intercourse with foreigners, in terms as unsparing as those of Amos or Isaiah, and at personal risk to himself. He expresses his approval of (many) Protestants by saying, “You have no tobacco and we have none,” as though Turks

were not almost universally addicted to its use, though the *mufti* condemns it. He complains that in the fast of Ramazan people eat so much by night that during a month of fasting they actually grow fat, and charges his great congregation in the mosque with having learned from Christians to drink, and now having become worse drunkards than their guides. But when my venerable friend paints for my benefit a picture of real Mohammedanism, the two views are as different as any double narratives or parallel codes in the Pentateuch. Each, from an Oriental standpoint, is true, if not the whole truth.

Doctors of Mohammedan law affirm that the faithful are allowed four wives each; but one of the faithful, a man of sufficient ability to be a constable, insists that the limit is seven. All the orthodox authorities claim that wine is forbidden; but Shia Turks, who are a large proportion of the whole number, use wine, and defend the practice, if it is not carried to such excess as to fuddle the brain. In Deut. xvi. 2 the Paschal animal, probably according to a custom far older than Moses, is allowed to be from the flock or the herd, whereas generally a lamb was prescribed and used. Not very long ago two villagers separately described to me their village custom of offering a sacrifice in the spring of every year. One said, "We sacrifice a bullock"; the other, "We owe our *noumen* two sheep." If a few thousand years hence these two statements, alleged to be by contemporaries, from the same village, and describing the same rite—one including a relic of Anatolian polytheism—could be adequately treated, just think what a pretty piece of criticism might result!

Christianity rapidly filtered into Asia Minor, and was the State religion from Constantine on until Mohammed II. drove the wedge of Islam, which had entered the country several centuries earlier, home to the heart by taking Constantinople in 1453. Yet in this twentieth century of grace pagan elements survive in Christianity, as in Mohammedanism, and a considerable part of their real religion is common to both, just as Baal worship was a lingering snare in Israel.

For example, sacrifice is practised now on every high hill—to speak as an Oriental—under every green tree, and beside every sacred grave, grove, or spring. Sacrificial blood is poured out now, as by David at the threshing-floor of Araunah, to check the progress of cholera or conflagration, and is often struck upon the side-posts and lintel of a house-door, just as was done at the Passover. Its meaning and ritual will be discussed by any white-turbaned *hoja* or black-capped priest you interview, but their prescriptions and descriptions, even from the same man at different times, vary among themselves in a manner strikingly suggestive of the Old Testament. It is usually said that the sacrificial animal must be a male, but some allow hens, cows, and female sheep. It is *en règle* to secure the services of a priest, but if none is present the virtue of the offering is not impaired. The priest should bless the salt last fed to the victim before its death, or, if convenient, the meat and other food placed on the sacrificial table. Two of the highest authorities have told me that, strictly, all the meat belongs to the chief representative of the sanctuary where the offering takes place, as the Divine representative, but the rule is never enforced. More liberal interpretation allows the chief ecclesiastic, *imam* or *dervish*, but half, or a good piece of meat, preferably the right thigh, raw or cooked, and the skin. The meat should be divided into three parts, proportions not specified, so that the poor and the friends as well as the household of the worshipper may participate; and if you apply a probe sharpened with Occidental mathematics, you will be told that seven families should be represented. All regulations assign the skin to the officiating clergyman, but in these years at the Courban Festival, the great Mohammedan sacrifice, all skins are claimed by the Turkish theocracy for the benefit of the Hedjaz railway, designed to carry pilgrims to Mecca; yet at the Courban of last year I heard a preacher, addressing 1,000 men, say that half hid their sacrificial skins and half sold them for personal gain. On another occasion I remember how the voice of old Piri Baba, *sheikh* of the Bek Tashi dervishes in our town, reminded me of

Malachi, as he complained that people are sometimes so shameless as to bring inferior and injured animals for sacrifice, and entirely forget the right of the priest. As some of these rites were once described to a friend, he remarked : " I don't see that you have got very definite rules for the sacrificial offering." The well-read scholar was looking for a definiteness that in practice *was never there*. In general, all the common people about us resort to sacrifice in critical emergencies, observe certain outline rules, perform the sacrifice with or without a priest, select the best offering that they can afford, and use the meat much as their own need or sense of propriety dictates.

Professor Davidson uttered what for Asia Minor is true to-day when, in the introduction to his commentary on Ezekiel, he said : " While the sacrifices in general and the ideas which they expressed were fixed and constant, the particulars, such as the kind of victims and the number of them, the precise quantity of meal, oil, and the like, were held non-essential, and alterable when a change would better express the idea." In further illustration, it may be remarked that in an Armenian village, where they cannot obtain wine for sacramental purposes, they use a mixture of soured milk and water. The lack of a desirable, habitual feature of worship cannot prevent or vitiate the worship entirely.

Professor Sir William Ramsay, lecturing at Mansfield College in April, argued that the course of religious history has not been one of continuous evolution upward, but includes a story of degenerations. The record of nearly 2,000 years in Asia Minor confirms his view. Mohammedanism, after nearly ten centuries' occupancy of the field, with all the internal and external influences making for progress, not only has not attained a higher stage of religious culture, but has in some respects distinctly degenerated. And Christianity, after a measure of ten centuries, and ten more in which to evolve its finest flower, is syncretistic, superstitious, distorted, and debased. There is a fair argument from analogy raised by the religious history of these twenty centuries since the Christian era that the

Old Testament view of the religious history preceding the Christian era is true ; that Hebrew religion was pure high up the stream ; and that some at least of the tributary fountains that swelled the current were corrupt and vitiating.

Criticism argues that silence in regard to the historical observance of a rite proves that the rite is not known. It is an argument that must be used with caution, and is set aside by any positive testimony. I once met a Greek villager, who said, poor fellow ! that he heard that day the name of Christ for the first time in his life. What would be the critical inference in such a case ? Imagine a set prayer for “mouse day,” used every spring by Armenian Christians ; or a priest “reading” from the Armenian Psalter over a Turk who sought his help in some affliction, without taking the trouble to learn from what the poor man was suffering ; or the ecclesiastical appointment of Ps. lxxvii. to be repeated at the sacrifice of a hen ; or a metal cross cast into the sea for a Greek diver to seek in the hope of securing luck thereby ; or reading from the Gospels at the four sides of a midsummer fire by night and then jumping through the flames ; or regarding certain graves, groves, springs, and stones as sacred each to a certain saint ; or any of a thousand and one divinations and incantations for the prevention and cure of disease. An Oriental Christian supposes that he is loyal to Christ, just as an ancient Israelite supposed that he was loyal to Jehovah. The modern worship of pictures and *icons* corresponds almost exactly with the tree and pillar worship of the Old Testament. Neither was any part of the original dispensation ; each was a snare to the people, was authorized and regulated by certain of the hierarchy, and was unsparingly denounced by the spiritually-minded.

The twelve orders of dervishes are the successors of and no improvement upon the Nazirites. They take the *nezir* or vow upon them still. A wandering Kaderi dervish, who was a guest in my house some months ago, told me that he was a Shukhbazari, and then, to enlighten my ignorance, explained that Arabs, Circassians, and Shukhbazaris are “own brothers, children of



one father and one mother." He used a Scripture form of expression to make me understand that the three peoples possessed the same traits of character.

On the Israelites leaving Egypt, three times it is narrated how they, especially the women, "asked (the word should never have been translated *borrowed*) of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment. And Jehovah gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they despoiled the Egyptians." This has been supposed to prove that the Israelites were free of moral obligations to foreigners. I think that interpretation would never present or commend itself to an Oriental as the meaning intended. When one party has been in service to another and the relation is terminated, the departing servant expects a present from his former master, and the master expects to give it. The custom is of universal observance throughout the East, and especially women cannot be refused. Here is the natural explanation of the Hebrew boast when they were well on the desert road, "Aha! we spoiled the Egyptians."

The pronunciation "Yawe" for the tetragrammaton is Western. The consonants are of more weight than the vowels in a Semitic word, and that pronunciation for Jehovah or Yahwe which omits the sound of the middle radical, *h*, is a Cockney pronunciation and certainly does not represent the original.

The Oriental conception of government is Theocratic; high officers of the State can, if they choose, exercise priestly functions at any time. A *sheikh*, or head of a clan, may be either a civil or religious chief, and because of holding one position he has a right to the privileges of the other. An Oriental would expect such a leader as Moses to act as chief priest whenever he chose to do so, would expect to find Joshua ministering at the tent because he was Moses' representative, and would grant Saul the authority to offer sacrifice, and Ezekiel's prince the right to regulate it, if he wished.

It has been urged that Joab would not have fled for refuge to

the horns of the altar in Jerusalem, if the Deuteronomic cities of refuge had been already appointed. But from what I have seen in Turkey I should certainly expect a sanctuary so sacred as Jehovah's altar to be regarded as the safest possible place of refuge, whatever other sanctuaries there might be. In the recent massacres of the Armenians the helpless victims crowded into their churches, sure that Turks would respect the altar of God, if they had any mercy at all. And it showed the fierceness with which the Armenians were pursued, that they perished, like Joab, in the sacred precincts.

In so far as there is any value in these paragraphs they go to show that some of the alleged contradictions of Scripture, with which the critics measure their strength, would never present any difficulty if viewed from the Oriental standpoint of the author or compiler; silence sometimes remains unbroken because there was no sufficient necessity for speaking; rules are subject to revision, and details may vary as need requires; and it is necessary to remember the chapter on “degeneracy” in the science of evolution. Archæology, in that limited field where its testimony is available, tends to confirm the accuracy and historicity of the writers of the Old Testament, which some criticism tends to minimize. Similarly Orientalism tends to show these writers as decent citizens, fairly competent to grasp facts and state them in good faith.

Where are the men who will do for the Old Testament what Professor Ramsay is doing for the New? It is not enough that a young student should be able to read Arabic with the aid of a grammar, a lexicon, and a student-lamp made in Germany. He should go to the lands where the Old Testament history was made, cut loose from Europeans, and learn the vernacular of the people. He should eat at Bedouin tables, sleep in their tents, travel in their caravans, attend their worship, and live their life as one of them, amid the scenes of “the unchanging East.” My own honoured teacher, Professor S. I. Curtiss, found the fascination and the value of such study, but alas! the end of his strenuous career was already just at hand. The field is open for

interpreters of the Old Testament, who will utilize the results of Criticism, Assyriology, and other learning, in the spirit of the Orientalism that inevitably pervades the books.



### The Baptist's Question.

BY LIEUT.-COLONEL G. MACKINLAY (LATE R.A.).

**I**T has long been a disputed point whether John the Baptist was faithful or not in sending his disciples to Christ to ask the question, "Art Thou He that cometh, or look we for another?" (Matt. xi. 3). The casual reader may think that a dispirited prisoner had given way to despondency, and that he who had been a most bold witness was fast becoming faithless and unbelieving.

A little investigation, however, shows that he was undoubtedly right and true in acting as he did.

Let us consider the general character of the Baptist. His was a very unusual combination of unbending firmness and boldness before men, with great humility before Christ. He sternly rebuked all sinners (Matt. iii. 7), and did not even spare King Herod (Matt. xiv. 4). Yet his delight was to magnify Christ (John i. 29), and to speak of himself in the humblest terms, when he said "I am not worthy to unloose" the latchet of my Master's shoe (John i. 27), and "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John iii. 30).

Let us for the moment exclude from consideration John's question to Christ, and let us turn to the many other facts recorded about him in the Gospels. Living alone and apart, he faithfully fulfilled his position of great trust; *he* received very many commendations and not a single rebuke from Christ, though Peter and the rest of the disciples who companied with Jesus frequently failed and were often blamed. The explanation appears to be that John was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb (Luke i. 15).