

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 Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

It is only a year or two since a student, returning from a course of study in Germany, said that there were only two English scholars whom he found accepted in Germany without reserve—Professor A. B. Davidson of Edinburgh and Professor H. M. Gwatkin of Cambridge. At the recent Church Congress Professor Gwatkin read a paper. It was scarcely heard then; it has absolutely been ignored since. But it seems to be the greatest of all the papers that were read at that Congress.

Its title is 'The Unrest of the Age.' It is a sufficiently general title to please us all. But Professor Gwatkin was not responsible for the guileless title; he was responsible for the searching words he uttered under it—words that we dare to say pleased nobody out and out. We give them on another page.

If there is a historical blunder in the New Testament, it is found in the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel. It is the census near the end of Herod's reign while Quirinius was governor of Syria (Lk 2^{1ff}). Some say it is more than a blunder, it is a pure invention. Strauss and Renan dismiss it contemptuously in a footnote. Yet St. Luke makes much to hang upon it. You

cannot let it go and be as you were. The birth in Bethlehem of our Saviour hangs upon it. And St. Luke's credibility as a historian hangs upon it. In Professor Ramsay's words, if this is a blunder, it is a complication of blunders, the entire story must be relegated to the realm of mythology; and the writer who mistakes fable for fact, and tries to prop up his mistake by an error of the grossest kind, can retain no credit as an historical authority.

Professor Ramsay has written a book about it. He has written his book about this 'blunder' of St. Luke's, and nothing else. He reckons it worth a whole volume. And if he can dispose of the 'blunder,' if he can reassert the statement and restore St. Luke's credibility, we shall not grudge the space he occupies.

Professor Ramsay calls his new book *Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* (Hodder & Stoughton, crown 8vo, pp. 280, 5s.). For that is the root of the matter. If Christ was born at Bethlehem, St. Luke states the fact, and the time and circumstances may be a blunder, but they are not an imposture. If Christ was not born at Bethlehem, then St. Luke was credulously imposed upon as to that and all the circumstances surrounding it, or else he has cruelly imposed upon us.

St. Luke's statement, according to the translation of the Revised Version, reads in this way: 'Now it came to pass in those days, there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to enrol themselves, every one to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David; to enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child.' Now the misstatements here are said to be many. Cæsar Augustus had not the control of *all the world*, and could not issue such a decree; even if the Roman world is meant, Palestine was governed by a native king, and Augustus would never have set aside his jurisdiction; but no such enrolment ever did take place; and in particular, Quirinius was not governor of Syria when Christ was born, but quite another man. It is a smaller matter that men would not have been sent all over the world to be enrolled in their native city, but would have been enrolled where they lived; or that in any case their wives would never have had to go with them.

We must face these difficulties. They are real. To many they are decisive. And we must face them honourably. The harmonist at all hazards is an enemy to the cross of Christ. Professor Ramsay handles them separately, and, so far as we can see, fairly. First, he points out that in several places St. Luke uses the term 'world' when he means the Roman Empire only. Thus Demetrius spoke of the State-goddess Diana, 'whom all Asia and the world worshippeth'; and Paul and Silas were accused before the magistrates of Thessalonica because they had 'turned the world upside down.' In both cases the outside barbarians were absent from the speakers' thoughts. How much more would Augustus, in giving orders for a census or enrolment of the empire, ignore the parts of the earth that were beyond his sway,

and calmly speak of the whole world. Then it is demonstrable that Palestine, though governed by a dependent king, was at this time reckoned part of the Roman Empire and liable to enrolment. Strabo and Appian, more carefully read, have put that fact beyond dispute. But we face a greater difficulty when we are told that no record exists of a census of the whole Roman world having been made at this time.

Let us face it. Professor Ramsay bids us look at the language first. St. Luke does not say that a single census of the Roman world was ordered. He uses the present tense (*ἀπογράφεσθαι πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην*). He means that Augustus ordered enrolments to be regularly made. What Augustus did was to lay down the principle of systematic enrolment. And then, when he has stated that, St. Luke proceeds to say, 'This was the first enrolment, when Quirinius was administering Syria'; and all persons proceeded to go for enrolment each to his own city.' But *was* there a system of periodic enrolment in Palestine at this time? There was. At least there was in Egypt. And the presumption is so strong that it prevailed in Palestine also as to reach a practical certainty.

It is the discovery of this momentous fact that gave Professor Ramsay the occasion to write his book. Recently three different scholars announced about the same time, and independently of one another, the discovery that periodic enrolments were made in Egypt under the Roman Empire. These were Mr. Kenyon of the British Museum in the *Classical Review* for March 1893; Dr. Wilcken in *Hermes* for 1893, p. 203 ff.; and Dr. Viereck in *Philologus*, 1893, p. 219 ff. We do not need to go into these discoveries minutely here, or into the subsequent confirmation of them. It is enough to say that they place the fact of periodic enrolments in Egypt beyond question, and that these enrolments were called by St. Luke's word, *Apographai*. They were an enrolment or numbering of the population according to households, and were quite distinct from the valuation

for taxing purposes, which used to be considered the only proper kind of Roman census.

That alters the situation. No such discovery has yet been made for Syria. But such enrolments did actually exist: St. Luke has not invented them. And, further, it is extremely improbable that he had extended to Syria what was confined to Egypt. It is not in the least likely that he knew anything about Egypt or its enrolments. There is also positive evidence that in Syria itself such enrolments were made. In particular, there is the evidence of an inscription, once condemned by Mommsen, but now, through the discovery in Venice of the other half of the stone, found to be genuine, that when Quirinius was governor of Syria (and almost certainly when he was governor *first*) an enumeration or enrolment was made of the province of Apameia.

Now these enrolments were periodical. And working back by periods of fourteen years from those known to have taken place later, we find that the first enrolment in Syria occurred in the year 8-7 B.C. But there is reason to believe that in Herod's jurisdiction the enrolment was not actually carried out for at least a year later. Herod might have escaped it altogether, for it was a risk to make it in Judæa; but he fell under the displeasure of Augustus at this time. In B.C. 8 according to Schürer, or B.C. 7 according to Lewin, Augustus wrote a letter to Herod informing him that whereas he had hitherto regarded him as a friend, henceforth he would treat him as a subject. The first-fruits of that letter was probably the order that the enrolment should go on. Herod would send an embassy to Rome, and thus the year or more would be consumed before it actually was made. There is good reason to believe that the enrolment took place in the late summer of the year 7 or the year 6 B.C.

Now Professor Ramsay points out that in the NEW DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE the conclusion is

reached that the birth of Christ took place in the year 6 B.C. Starting from a different point of view, and working on utterly diverse lines, Mr. Turner, in his article on the 'Chronology of the New Testament,' has reached the same result as Professor Ramsay. And at the last moment Professor Paterson reminds Professor Ramsay that the result which both have attained agrees with the celebrated calculation of Kepler as to the star of the Wise Men.

There remains the difficulty of the governorship of Quirinius. Quirinius administered Syria from A.D. 6 to 9, and during that administration there occurred a great census or valuation of property in Palestine. Obviously the incidents described by St. Luke are irreconcilable with that date. But Quirinius had administered Syria at some previous time. Mommsen considers that the most probable date for his first government of Syria is about B.C. 3 to 1. Neither does that agree with the date which Professor Ramsay has found probable for the enrolment of Palestine and the birth of our Lord. And in the year B.C. 6 it is certain that Quirinius was not governor of Syria. Quinctilius Varus was governor then.

But does St. Luke say that Quirinius was governor of Syria? Our English versions translate him so. But his own word is 'acting as leader' (*ἡγεμονεύοντος*). Now at another time Vespasian conducted a war in Palestine while Mucianus was governor of Syria, on which Palestine was dependent. Tacitus styles Vespasian *dux*, the Latin word which exactly corresponds with St. Luke's *ἡγεμών*. History tell us that before the death of Herod, Quirinius was engaged in a war which had to do with the foreign relations of Syria. In short, Professor Ramsay comes to the conclusion that in B.C. 6 Varus was controlling the internal affairs of Syria as Proconsul, while Quirinius was commanding its armies and directing its foreign policy as a lieutenant of Augustus (*Legatus Augusti propretore*). Whereupon St.

Luke accurately states that the first periodic enrolment of Palestine took place while Quirinius was 'acting as leader' in Syria.

The foregoing is a short and altogether inadequate account of the chief matter in Professor Ramsay's new book. But the book contains other matters besides that. And before leaving it we shall touch on one of these.

It is St. Luke's attitude towards the Roman world. St. Luke, as Professor Ramsay reminds us, though in essentials a Paulinist, yet differed from St. Paul in one important respect. St. Paul was a Roman, he was a Greek. It is true that St. Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, and from that point of view a member of the Greek world. But his Roman citizenship overrode his Greek citizenship. From infancy he had been educated to understand his position as a Roman. St. Luke was not a Roman. Like the rest of the Greeks, he never quite understood Roman matters. The mystery of the Roman names puzzled him. He never even tells us what St. Paul's Roman name was. There is no doubt that St. Paul had a Roman name. As a Roman citizen, he was bound to have a Roman name. By his Roman name—Gaius Julius Paullus or something of that style—he revealed his Roman citizenship to the magistrates at Philippi and to Claudius Lysias. By his Roman name he appealed to Cæsar. But St. Luke does not feel the mystery of its majesty, and never tells us what it was.

Thus St. Paul had as it were an advantage over St. Luke, in being a Roman. He had also an advantage in being a Jew. To St. Paul the distinction was vivid between Roman, Greek, and Jew; to St. Luke the only valid distinction was between Jew and Gentile. When he writes, he writes for Gentiles. He is not conscious of their separation into Greeks and Romans; he is only conscious that they are not Jews. Accordingly he carefully explains customs that are purely

Jewish, and describes localities that only a Jew would be familiar with. He tells the distance of Emmaus and the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem, but he thinks that the coasts of the Ægean Sea need no explanation. He even silently inserts a Gentile custom in place of a Jewish one when it would be more intelligible to his Gentile readers.

Professor Ramsay's example is in the Gospel. In Mk 2¹⁻⁴ we have an account of the way in which a man sick of the palsy was laid before Jesus. 'And when they could not come nigh unto Him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was (literally, they unroofed the roof); and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay.' To St. Mark's Jewish readers that was quite intelligible. The house was a humble one, with a flat roof of earth or other material, which was easily destroyed and as easily replaced. The bearers took advantage of this. Mounting on the roof, they broke it up, and let down the couch through the hole which they thus made.

But without elaborate explanation St. Luke's hearers would not have understood this. Their houses were constructed differently. They were covered with tiles, and had a hole (*impluvium*) in the roof of the principal chamber (*atrium*), the chamber where the company would be assembled. St. Luke does not stay to explain. He does not think it necessary to turn aside from his proper subject to describe differences of architecture. He simply represents the house as if it were a Gentile one, the roof tiled and the opening ready. 'And not finding by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went up to the house-top, and let him down through the tiles with his couch into the midst before Jesus (Lk 5¹⁹).

'For some years the conviction has been spreading and deepening, in the minds of those best qualified to form an opinion on the subject, that in both systematic and apologetic theology there

is room and need for a revision of principles and methods, and for, at least, a tentative effort towards a restatement of religious doctrine and belief.' And Principal Hodgson makes the 'tentative effort' in his new book *Theologia Pectoris* (T. & T. Clark, pp. 207, 3s. 6d.).

It is the freedom of the religious life that has made the restatement necessary. The old theology was adapted to an age when it could be said, as Bacon said in his age, 'If we proceed to treat of theology, we must quit the barque of human reason, and put ourselves on board the ship of the Church, which alone possesses the divine needle for justly shaping the course.' That age has passed away for Principal Hodgson. In the new age, not only the Church, but every other external thing is losing its authority. There are few teachers, Dr. Hodgson thinks, who would now endorse the assertion of Dr. Chalmers that 'the authority of every revelation rests exclusively upon its external evidences.' To Dr. Hodgson just the opposite of that statement is the truth now. 'Objective facts there must be, but so long as they are only objective they possess no value for us and carry no obligation. The facts and events of sacred history are indispensable for the suggesting of the ideas and doctrines of Christian teaching. But they carry significance and value only in so far as we are able to interpret and receive them.'

Therefore our systems of theology have hitherto begun wrong. They used to begin with the doctrine of God. More recently they have begun with the doctrine of Christ. Both are wrong. They ought to begin with the doctrine of man. It is the nature, condition, and needs of man that determine his theology.

And undoubtedly Dr. Hodgson's way is the biblical way. Whatever be claimed for systematic theology, biblical theology has always to do with man. Go back as far as we are allowed to go in the history of God, and we find Him thinking of man. He is thinking of man all through

the record of revelation. This does not mean that apart from man's thought of God, God has no existence. Dr. Hodgson does not mean that. He believes in the miracles of Jesus. He does not say that these miracles have no place in history and no place in fact unless we believe them. But he does say that the miracles of Jesus, as well as Jesus Himself and the God and Father of Jesus, owe their value to us altogether to our need of them.

It is only when we see that biblical theology begins with man that we can discover the worth of some of its most precious portions. As long as the Prologue to St. John's Gospel is looked upon as a theological statement—part of a doctrine of God—we leave it outside. And then the words of the third verse, 'All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made,' are so much accurate theological formula, without spirit and without life. But when we see that the creation was the creation of man. When we learn that even the whole world was made for man and not man for the world, and that Christ's interest in the creation was His interest in man, then we discover that this theological statement carries intimate vital lessons to us.

For if all things were made by Him, we can see first of all that He knows the make of them. Then when He came to the earth it was easy for Him to walk on the water. We cannot do so. We do not even know that we cannot do so till we try. We do not know the make of water. But He knows; and He knows just what is necessary to give it the power to support a human body.

Again, when Christ appears on earth He knows exactly what He has come to do. For He had made man in His own image. He knows then how much of that image man has lost, how much has to be done to restore it. He comes into the world to be a redeemer. That is the very end of His coming, and His aim is as definite as His end. He knows exactly what to do.

He comes to restore to man the image in which he was made, His own image. So He offers that image as the example. They are not wrong who tell us that Christ is the great example; they are wrong only when they tell us He is no more. He is the great example. We must be conformed to His image in all things. And that is the very first thing that Christ offers us. 'The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.'

And then He uses the means whereby we may be conformed to His image. The means is love—love in action. Having loved His own that were in the world, having loved them indeed before they came into the world, for it was His love that brought them in, He loves them to the end. And greater love hath no man than this that a man should lay down his life.

A few weeks ago there appeared in *The Christian World* a letter from a 'Pastor' under the heading, 'An Anxious Enquiry.' 'May I ask my brethren in the ministry what their experience has been of the effects of the preaching of the gospel of the Fatherhood? I was converted under a gospel of "terrors," and used to preach it myself, but for ten years have discarded it in favour of the more tender and, to me, reasonable message, but I find it appeals only to the few. Somehow it does not lay hold of the masses like the older, even harder, gospel. To me it is the true gospel, but what am I to do in face of the failure of it to lay hold of men savingly? I am perplexed, humbled, and pained. I long to see souls saved, but though crowds come to hear, yet apparently I have no power in my gospel to save.'

Next week there appeared four replies. The first was from the Rev. T. Rhondda Williams of Bradford, whose new book has been the occasion of our turning to this matter. That letter we shall consider in a little. The second was signed 'Fifty Years a Teacher.' 'The letter you publish from "Pastor,"' said this teacher, 'is one I should like

to see discussed, for it is my own difficulty. I was converted fifty years ago under what he calls the gospel of terrors, and discarded it as he did. I have taught constantly and done my best with children, but though I can see some good, it seems to me there was something stronger and better about the old Puritans and the Christians I can remember, and more converts were made then.'

The third letter was signed by the Rev. J. P. Perkins of Worthing. "'Pastor's" inquiry about the preaching of the Fatherhood,' said Mr. Perkins, 'is a very serious one. I, too, firmly believe in the universal Fatherhood of God, but it is a doctrine for Christians, and not for converting men from sin to holiness.' And then he said that in his ministry of twenty-three years he had found that the most potent truths for conversion are the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the full and effectual atonement provided by the Lord Jesus on the Cross (which he describes in a parenthesis as 'Christ and Him crucified' without fear of the charge of 'Paulinism'), and finally the emphatic declaration of the necessity and power of the Holy Ghost for conversion, sanctification, and effective work for God. The last writer, who was nameless, said: 'In reply to "Pastor" of last week, I may say I also have for some time preached "the gospel of the Fatherhood," but without visible results. Last Sunday I resolved to try the old gospel of terror (so-called), and the result was a genuine, open, old-fashioned conversion.'

The following week this last letter was directly dealt with by the Rev. John A. Hamilton, M.A., of Penzance. Mr. Hamilton described the writer as 'a grim humorist.' The writer seemed to say that he *believed* in the universal Fatherhood of God, but finding it did not produce conversions, he *preached* 'the old gospel of terror.' Mr. Hamilton does not suppose any man would do that and avow it. To do that even without avowing it would show us, says Mr. Hamilton, to be sons of Gehenna and to make sons of Gehenna. It would be to misrepresent, calumniate, blaspheme

God in our anxiety to make an instant impression. And so he calls the writer a grim humorist, and thinks that the full severity of his satire may not be at once and to everybody apparent.

Mr. Hamilton's letter is most appropriately followed in the same issue by one from the Rev. G. P. M'Kay of Leigh. 'As it is confessedly found by some that there is not much converting power in the doctrine of God's universal Fatherhood, it might be well,' says Mr. M'Kay, 'for those who have embraced that doctrine to inquire *whether it is true*'—the italics being his own. Mr. M'Kay does not believe that it is true. He holds that 'by their fruits ye shall know them' applies to doctrines as well as to men. The fruit of this doctrine is indifference; for if all are already children of God, *without* faith in Jesus Christ, the point is gone from the rousing appeal, 'Ye must be born again.' He thinks that the universal Fatherhood is bound up with universal salvation. For if all are children of God, all are partakers of the Divine nature; then all must live as long as the universal Father lives, and all must live with the Father, for the heart rebels against the teaching that any of them will live for ever in hell. 'I, for one, believe,' says Mr. M'Kay, 'that such preaching accounts for much of the "dry-rot" of the present-day pulpit.'

But in the same issue there is a third letter. It is signed by the Rev. Ebenezer Davis of Old Charlton. Mr. Davis finds nothing wrong in preaching the universal Fatherhood of God; what he finds wrong is the looking for conversions. It is not a little significant, he says, that the very term 'conversion' disappears from the Revised Version, which has in its place 'turned' or 'turning.' Were the Twelve converted, he asks, when they were called by Christ? He does not find that either Christ or the apostles ever manifested 'that feverish anxiety for the "conversion" of their hearers so characteristic of modern evangelists.' And then he puts his doctrine on the subject into a single pregnant sentence, when he says, it is

an assumption that none but the converted are saved, and that unless converted in the few and evil days of this brief life men are hopelessly lost.

Only another letter appears. It is in the next issue; it is unsigned; and it adds nothing to the matter. But the letter of Mr. Rhondda Williams, which we passed over in its place, comes in here. For Mr. Williams considers that the ordinary doctrine of God's Fatherhood and the ordinary preaching of conversion are equally wrong. What does a 'Pastor' mean by 'saving souls'? Surely he has made some men good; surely he has helped some men to the true religious life. 'Do the crowds who come to hear him preach go away time after time without feeling any uplifting influence, without catching sight of the higher visions of life, without knowing anything of the pull of the divine power? Does he neither strengthen nor beautify any character, and does he minister no comfort and consolation? If so, his ministry is indeed a failure, and it is time to be more than anxious. But if he does these things, does he not *save*?'

Thus Mr. Williams objects to the popular conception of conversion, or of saving souls. But he objects yet more to the popular preaching of the Fatherhood. In the revolt against what is called a gospel of terrors, many, he says, ascribe to God a Fatherhood which no father on earth would find sufficient for the training of his family. The love of God is often expounded as if it were mere softness of heart. But there is sternness in God that He may be feared. Our own moral nature, as well as the evolution of history, testify that it was no mistake that long ago declared 'Our God is a consuming fire,' and 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

But the question remains, and it is after all *the* question: Is the universal Fatherhood of God a fact? That question is only once touched in these letters. But Mr. Rhondda Williams has just published a volume of sermons through Mr. Horace

Marshall (*Beief and Life*, 3s. 6d.), and in that volume he directly answers it. He says that St. Paul and St. John do not preach the universal Fatherhood of God, but Jesus Christ does.

Mr. Williams says that St. Paul and St. John (he means the New Testament writers generally outside the Gospels) do not preach and do not hold the doctrine that God is the Father of all men. To them the phrase, 'sons of God,' or 'children of God,' describes an acquired character. It denotes something that does not belong to all men as such. St. Paul says that 'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.' He tells the Galatian Christians, 'For ye are all the children of God, *through faith in Christ Jesus.*' To St. Paul even Jesus was not *born* the Son of God. He was 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh,' and 'determined to be the Son of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness.' With St. Paul's teaching St. John agrees. 'As *many as received Him*, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' And in his first epistle St. John makes a distinction between 'the children of God' and 'the children of the devil,' saying also that 'whosoever doeth not righteousness' must not be counted among the children of God, nor 'he that loveth not his brother.'

But Mr. Williams holds that Christ teaches that we are all the children of God. He admits the distinction between 'the children of the Kingdom' and 'the children of the wicked one.' He admits that Jesus called one man 'the son of perdition,' and that He once denounced the people before Him as 'the offspring of vipers.' He admits that one passage 'gives Him' these words: 'If God were your Father, ye would love Me; but ye are of your father the devil.' He admits that in the Sermon on the Mount He blessed the peacemakers and said, 'For they shall be called the children of God.' And yet he holds that 'the universal Fatherhood of God is distinct enough in much of His teaching.'

He finds it in two places. The first is the phrase 'that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.' He has already quoted that phrase as proof that a certain *character* is needed if they would be children of God. Now he says that God is spoken of as being *already* their Father, though they are to *become* His children. The other place is the parable of the Prodigal Son. 'In the immortal parable of the Prodigal Son, the fatherhood and sonship continue through all the story of sin.'

The Unrest of the Age.

BY PROFESSOR H. M. GWATKIN, D.D., DIXIE PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY,
CAMBRIDGE.

UNREST like that of our time is not a new thing in history, but one familiar to every student. We see it in the age of Isaiah, when the Assyrian was breaking up the primeval kingdoms of Asia; and again in the times of Pericles, when the old beliefs of Athens were unsettled. We see it on a great scale in our Lord's time, when the ancient world of nations was melting down into the Roman Empire; and not less clearly four hundred years later, when the Empire itself was dissolving into a

new world of nations. The sixteenth century was profoundly stirred by the restoration of learning, the discovery of America, and the reformation of religion; and that again was an age of unrest. There is deep unrest in every age of change; and how shall we escape, on whom revelations of God in history and science have come with such bewildering rapidity?

'His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.' Is it