

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

## Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE is nothing in the second number of the *Hibbert Journal*, the number for January, so sensational as Mr. Claude Montefiore's protest against the way in which Christian theologians neglect the scholarship of the Jews. His charges are definite, he names the men who are most to blame, and his words are strong.

Mr. Montefiore does not say that Christian theologians neglect *everything* that Jewish scholars write. They neglect only what they write about the Law. If Schechter writes in the *Jewish Quarterly* about a fragment of Sirach, all the great Christian scholars notice it at once. But when one of the greatest Rabbinic theologians of the world (he still means Schechter) writes an important series of articles on his own subject,—a subject about which the Christian theologians are confessedly unable to speak at first hand,—obstinate silence is preserved.

What is the reason? Why should Christians ignore what a Jew writes about the Law? Mr. Montefiore hints that they are afraid. He says that the picture of Jewish legalism contained in the New Testament is not true. And he suspects that the Christian scholar is afraid lest, if he listened to the Jewish scholar, he might have to confess that even Jesus of Nazareth said things

—or is represented to have said things—about the Jews of His day which are not in accordance with fact.

Mr. Montefiore selects two examples from the sayings of our Lord.

The first is found in St. Mark vii. 11. There our Lord is represented as saying that it was customary for Jews to call a portion of their property 'Corban,' that is, a dedicated offering. By simply giving it this name, which meant that they intended to hand it over to the priests in the temple, they were relieved of the duty of using it in the support of their parents. Commentators add that the Rabbis approved of this: they even said that if the person who called his property 'Corban' did *not* hand it over to the uses of religion, he could not, in any case, give it to his parents: the parents must suffer now, whether the service of religion profited or not.

Mr. Montefiore says that this is not true. He says that Schechter wrote an essay on 'Legal Evasions of the Law,' and showed that it was impossible that such a custom could ever have prevailed. That essay was published as early as 1893 in an appendix to Mr. Montefiore's own Hibbert Lectures. Yet even the most advanced of the Christian commentators on St. Mark—he

names Holtzmann, the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and Menzies—go on ignoring the essay and repeating the slander.

The other example is from the same chapter. It is St. Mark vii. 4. The passage deals with the ceremonial cleansings of the Jews. In this verse it is stated that 'when they come from the market-place they do not eat till they have sprinkled themselves.' The statement is even stronger according to the most widely attested text. Swete and Menzies follow the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts in reading 'sprinkle' (*βαπτίζονται*); but all the rest of the manuscripts and all the versions read 'bathe' (*βαπτίζονται*), and they are followed by two of the latest commentators: Gould, who calls 'sprinkle' a manifest emendation, and Salmond.

What does this mean? It means that every time a Jew returned from doing any business he was compelled to take a bath. Swete is struck with the 'burden' of it. He says it suggests a standard which is Essene rather than Pharisaic. And Menzies remarks that 'the heavy burdens imposed on the people in this attempt were what drove publicans and sinners to despair.'

Mr. Montefiore again denies the truth of the picture. With the help of Schechter, he pointed out in his Hibbert Lectures that ritual uncleanness was not contracted in the market-place, and that the only occasion on which anything like bathing of the body was demanded was before a worshipper entered the temple. 'The ordinary layman might touch a corpse or a dead mouse. He could rub shoulders with the Gentile. The whole "burden" so eloquently denounced, and for the neglect of which the poor sinners and publicans are so much pitied and applauded, is an absolute myth.'

Mr. Montefiore admits that Schechter may be wrong. To his thinking he has proved that even the Sabbath was no burden but a delight to the ordinary Jew of the days of our Lord. He may

not have proved it to the satisfaction of every one else. Let him be refuted, then. There is only one Christian scholar in Europe or America who seems to read the things which Jewish scholars write. It is Professor Driver of Oxford. The rest simply ignore them. The silence is magnificent, says Mr. Montefiore, but is it the right way, he asks, in which the warfare of science should be waged?

'As one reads the biography of Jesus, one cannot fail to be struck with the effect that seems to have been exercised on His mind and nature by the wide prospect from a lofty elevation. Try to cut out the mountain scenes from His life. How much poorer would the Gospels be.'

Those are Professor W. M. Ramsay's words in his new book, *The Education of Christ: Hillside Reveries* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2s. 6d.). He recalls the choice of the Twelve 'on a mountain at dawn of day,' the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, the mountain in Galilee where the last instructions were given, the Temptation from 'an exceeding high mountain,' and the division of Christ's life when He was in Jerusalem between the temple and the Mount of Olives.

And then, with his curious felicity in seeing situations, Professor Ramsay believes that one incident in the life of our Lord which the generations of Christianity have supposed to have occurred in a house in Jerusalem, really took place upon the Mount of Olives.

It is the interview with Nicodemus. He came by night. Have we not been told to think of the frightened figure stealing through the streets of Jerusalem until he reached the humble lodging of the Man of Nazareth? The picture, Professor Ramsay thinks, is a mistake. St. Luke expressly tells us that during the final visit to Jerusalem Jesus used to retire every evening to the Mount of Olives. It was evidently a custom with Him from

the beginning of His ministry. St. John expressly mentions that on an earlier visit to Jerusalem He went *at evening* to the Mount of Olives, and early in the morning came again into the temple.

And now, in this interview with Nicodemus, 'as you read the words which St. John has preserved, you feel yourself out on the quiet hillside, with the breath of the evening moving gently around you,'—*the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth.* The time was the season of the year about the Passover, when—

Spring's awakening breath will woo the earth  
To feed with kindest dew its favourite flower.

'Awakening breath'—it is the very word which St. John uses: 'the breath (of the air) breatheth where it will.' In our northern land, says Professor Ramsay, we live within the walls of houses, and by these walls we are divided from the life of those nations—Roman, Greek, and Jew—whom we study so much and cannot understand. They lived in the open air. The breath of the open air which blew around them gives a tone to their literature and to their life which we cannot appreciate. When we think of Nicodemus going to speak to Jesus by night, we think of him slinking into a garret or a cellar in the city; Professor Ramsay thinks of him as knowing the great Teacher's custom and going forth to find Him on the mount.

Professor Goodwin Smith—who must not be confounded with Professor Goldwin Smith; he belongs to the Lane Theological Seminary of America—Professor Goodwin Smith has written a 'Critical Note' in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, for the quarter ending with December, on the controversy which recently took place between Harnack and Réville regarding the study of religion.

When the *Congrès d'Histoire des Religions* took place in Paris, in the end of the year 1900, Pro-

fessor Réville was able to report progress in the study of the history of religions among all the civilized nations of the earth, except one. He named Holland, France, England, Belgium, Switzerland, and the United States. He left out Germany. Were they surprised that he had not spoken of that 'classic home of universities'? He had nothing to say about instruction in the history of religions in the German universities because there was none. He had searched the programmes of the German universities carefully. He had found courses on every other conceivable subject, but none on the history of religions. If a German desires to look into the subject, he is recommended to a book by de la Saussaye, a Hollander. When the topic comes up for annual review in the *Theologische Jahresbericht*, it has to be entrusted successively to a Swiss, a Hollander, and a Dane.

Harnack read Réville's speech and felt the sting of it. In August 1901 he had to deliver his Rectorial Address before the University of Berlin. He did not name Réville. But he spoke of 'loud voices that declare our theological programme too short and scientifically unsatisfactory.' And he gave three reasons why the theological faculty of Germany ought not to include the study of Comparative Religion.

The first reason was that the religion of a nation can be properly studied only in connexion with the study of its language, history, and civil institutions. Germany must avoid *Dilettantismus*. Now the study of language, history, and civil institutions is outside the province of the theological faculty.

The second reason was that Christian theology has no business with any religion but that of the Bible. The religion of the Bible has been evolved, said Harnack, by a continual process extending over three thousand years. It is a living power to-day. He who knows not the religion of the Bible knows none; he who knows it, along with

its history, knows all. Christianity is not a religion among other religions; it is the religion.

The third reason was that the theological faculty of Germany had close relations with the State. These relations were always under some tension. Why introduce new elements of disturbance?

In the sixth number for 1901 of the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* Réville replied to Harnack.

The most astonishing argument is the third. Who would have supposed that German theology had to walk so gingerly? However, it is a domestic concern. Professor Réville can only rejoice in his own comparative freedom.

The arguments of general interest are the first and second. In the first argument Harnack suggests dilettantism. We must not be dabbling in everything he says; we must limit ourselves and be thorough. To be a student of Comparative Religion one must become a student of the language, history, and civil institutions of all the nations of the earth. Professor Réville replies that the study of religion demands universal knowledge no more than any other study. Every study has relations with other studies. But the specialist in one does not need to be a specialist in all the rest. He lets other men labour in their own fields, and when their results are ready he appropriates them.

But Harnack's most popular argument is that there is only one religion in the world, and it is the business of the Christian theologian to confine himself to that. Harnack calls it the religion of the Bible. Whereupon Réville asks at once whether the religion of the Bible can be understood without some study of the religions of Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and Greece. Harnack should be the first to answer, No. For he recognizes no method of study but the historical, he believes in no form of religion but the

evolutionary. Has not he himself had a chief hand in showing how much early Christianity owed to Hellenism? Pass down the history of Christianity. How can Gnosticism and Manichæism be understood without touching upon the religions of the East? How can the popular beliefs and customs of the Middle Ages be described without some reference to the religions of the Celts, Gauls, Germans, Scandinavians, and Slavs?

'The religion of the Bible is *the* religion.' Professor Réville agrees: 'I am personally fully convinced of the religious power and the incomparable morality of the gospel.' But can you assume its superiority? Will your dogmatic assertion—dogmatic assertions, by the way, come strangely from the arch-priest of anti-dogmatism—be accepted by the multitude? Christianity is alive, is it? So also are Buddhism, Islam, and the religions of China—intensely alive. The missionary conquests of Islam in Africa are more notable as yet than those of Christianity. Harnack himself admits, indeed, that the believer in the gospel cannot afford to-day to be ignorant of the religions with which it comes into daily contact in the East. He only seems to be afraid that the comparison will not be to the advantage of the gospel. Réville has greater faith in the gospel than that.

The 'logic of the situation,' says Professor Goodwin Smith, is on the side of the Frenchman. He seems to speak in a freer atmosphere; he lays more emphasis on the essential principles involved. Yet there are two great arguments which he does not use. There are two great reasons still why every student of Christianity should be a student of the religions of the world.

The first is, that the world 'is on the verge of a great spiritual and intellectual movement upward.' No movement of like significance has been seen since the era of the Renaissance and Reformation. Its characteristic is harmony and unity. The forces in the Christian Churches are no longer to

be spent in competition and antagonism to one another. Science is drawing closer to religion. 'The conviction,' says Professor Goodwin Smith, 'that the true solution of the world-problems is the religious solution, was never stronger than it is to-day.' The time is therefore at hand when the religious spirit will be examined under whatever religious form it is found. The Christian spirit already 'feels the elemental thrill of sympathy as it touches the common instincts of prayer, of self-surrender, of sacrifice, of hope for the future, in many systems that it was once taught to believe were forms of devil-worship.'

And the second reason is that since the study of religions has been made and will be made, it is our duty to see that that study is religious. In the nineteenth century, says Professor Goodwin Smith, we have had the philosophical, the psychological, the historical, the linguistic, the scientifically 'unprejudiced,' and the apologetic or polemic study of religions. The religious study remains to be tried. And by the religious study of religions Professor Goodwin Smith means 'the investigation of all religious beliefs and practices in the light of the Christian faith in an all-powerful, omnipresent, all-loving Heavenly Father, in the belief that the Logos is the Light that lighteth every man, and that the action of the Spirit of God has never been restricted to the confines of Judaism or of organic Christianity.'

It is with much regret that we receive the last number of *Present Day Papers*. The little magazine with its brick-red cover and strange floral device has been as welcome as any. No monthly number has been without some article of interest, for the editors, Mr. J. Wilhelm Rowntree and Mr. Henry Bryan Binns, know the gentle art of writing well themselves, and appreciate it in others. But especially has the magazine been welcome because of its revelation of a movement of great significance in Quakerism, and its central place in that movement.

It is a movement of scholarship. The Quakers have always been scholars. They have often led the Christian world, sometimes they have been far in advance of the Christian world, in the scholar's apprehension of the mind of Christ. They are not behind to-day. And it is the five volumes of *Present Day Papers* that will best tell the future historian (if he can find them, for they are going out of print) how Quakerism, in passing from one century into another, took courage to itself and became a leader in that radical study of the Bible which goes by the name of 'Higher Criticism.'

In the last number the most significant article is a review by Mr. W. H. Drummond of a book recently published through the Rationalist Press Association. The author of the book is Mr. J. M. Robertson, and its title is *Christianity and Mythology*.

The purpose of Mr. Robertson's book, as was pointed out in these pages on its appearance, is to show that the Gospel narratives, and much else in the New Testament, owe their existence to the maker and receiver of myths. The notion is not new, but Mr. Robertson gives it a sweep that compels new attention to it. Mr. Drummond quotes two passages: (1) 'Our analysis shows that on the one hand the Twelve Apostles, and on the other, such prominent teachings as the Sermon on the Mount, are just as mythical as the Virgin-birth, the Temptation, and the Resurrection;' and (2) 'The whole Christian Legend, in its present terminology, is demonstrably an adaptation of a mass of previous pagan myths.'

These sentences suggest that the whole book is, as Mr. Drummond expresses it, 'an essay in topsy-turvydom, which serious men need not pause to consider.' But such essays do not fall dead from the press. There is around this volume an air of authority which is not without its impression upon the unwary; and even its extravagance is hidden behind a claim to original research and freedom

from prejudice. The writer's results are revolutionary, but he knows what he is about. So Mr. Drummond reviews the work seriously. He finds reasons for doubting the worth of its conclusions.

The first is that Mr. Robertson evolves his facts largely out of his own inner consciousness. He has a faculty for seeing what he wants to see. He does not examine the date or authorship of the Gospels, he simply assumes that they are 'the literary travail of many generations.' He handles their contents in the same way. 'This is obviously a myth,' and 'that is clearly an interpolation,' without a shred of proof, without a single reference to the manuscripts or the history of the text.

Take his way with the Lord's Prayer. It is not a Christian prayer at all, he says. It belongs to the Jews. Not merely are there parallels to some of its clauses in later Jewish literature, it is a Jewish prayer in the form we have it, and it was simply appropriated by the early Christians.

What is his proof of that? His proof is solely this, that the Lord's Prayer occurs in the Didache. That the place where it occurs is Christian is shown by the previous reference to Christian Baptism, but Mr. Robertson will not admit that. And when you point to the words which introduce it—'as the Lord commanded in his Gospel'—he answers, 'they are an interpolation.'

Or look at his way with the words Nazareth and Nazarene. He wishes to show that the historical Jesus (who was a certain Jesus Pandira of the Talmud, the rest being mythology) had nothing to do with the city of Nazareth. The connexion, he says, arose out of the fact that the early Christians practised Naziritism. Now Mr. Robertson does know that Nazarite, an inhabitant of Nazareth, is spelt with an *a*, while Nazirite, a person separated to God, is spelt with an *i*. He knows that, but when it suits him he ignores it; conveniently using the Authorized Version spelling 'Nazarite' to bring the two words more closely

together. He knows that they are spelt with different letters, but evidently he does not know that they come from different roots, else he could not pass from the one to the other so easily as he does. And when he says that *ναζαρηαιος* (the word translated 'Nazarene' in Matthew and Acts) is 'the standing term for Nazirite in the Old Testament,' he says what is not true. The word occurs very rarely in the Old Testament, and when it does occur it is either in the form *ναζαρηαιος* or *ναζαρηαιος*.

Mr. Drummond's second reason for doubting the worth of Mr. Robertson's results is that there was no time before the issue of the Epistles of St. Paul and (say) the Gospel according to St. Mark for such an extraordinary forest of myth to grow up; that, even if there had been time, the intellectual conditions of the age were not favourable to the creation and diffusion of a new mythology; and that such a theory of the origin of Christian belief wholly fails to account for the influence of Christian ethics and Christian worship in the Roman Empire.

The last reason goes to the root of the matter. The New Testament, read without bias as it stands (and Mr. Drummond, who is a Unitarian, claims to be as free from bias as Mr. Robertson), does not give the impression that it is a farrago of contradictions and impossibilities, of commonplace Jewish ethics and childish mythologies. Mr. Robertson's theories are not required.

But now comes the significant part of Mr. Drummond's paper, the part on account of which we have referred to it.

Mr. Drummond has criticized Mr. Robertson's book severely. He does not wish, however, to leave the impression that there is nothing in it. On the contrary, he believes that Mr. Robertson has 'laid hold of a clue, the importance of which has not been recognized sufficiently in dealing with a certain class of New Testament difficulties.'

Biblical criticism, says Mr. Robertson, 'has fallen back on the textual analysis of the documents, leaving the question of truth and reason as much as possible in the background.' Mr. Robertson does not despise textual criticism. He calls it 'a great gain.' But to end with it, he says, is to leave much of the human significance of the phenomena unnoticed. With all this Mr. Drummond agrees. He says that here Mr. Robertson has put his finger upon a genuine weakness. For the really important matter is not whether we can harmonize the narratives of the birth of Christ in St. Matthew and St. Luke. We must go deeper than that. We must ask how each of these narratives assumed its present form, and whether they are historically true.

Now there are passages in the Gospels, says Mr. Drummond, about which we are more certain, and there are passages about which we are less. There are passages which carry their historical truth with them wherever they go, and there are passages which at once suggest the possibility of misunderstanding, or the growth of tradition, or the influence of later, perhaps even of alien, beliefs. This variety in 'authority' does not destroy the trustworthiness of the Gospels as a whole. It only tells us that we must examine every narrative, and, if it is suspicious, see whether even Mr. Robertson's theory of mythology may have some share in explaining it.

Then Mr. Drummond boldly acknowledges that for his part he is inclined to think that there is a great deal of evidence for definite mythological influence in the 'Birth Stories.' We must examine them, he thinks, once more. He does not expect much help from Mr. Robertson, for the way in which he tells us that the Sermon on the Mount is just as mythic as the Virgin-birth, shows how incapable he is for work of this kind. Those that are capable must examine the evidence for the Virgin-birth again. And they need not be afraid. For the Birth Stories, he says, constitute a prob-

lem by themselves, and whatever conclusion is reached upon them, it can have no legitimate effect upon our view of the Synoptic tradition as a whole.

The Virgin-birth of our Lord is the problem of problems at present. An important contribution to its discussion will be found on another page. It must now be admitted, however, that no discussion can be complete, or even more than begun, until the faith of other nations and the creed of other religions have been taken into account.

Among the rest there is the religion of Egypt. In his new book on *The Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia*, Professor Sayce has a highly instructive chapter on 'Egyptian Religion in the History of Theology.' He quotes from a Papyrus at St. Petersburg a prophecy of an Egyptian Messiah; and then he says that yet more striking is the belief in the virgin-birth of the god Pharaoh, which goes back at least to the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

Even as early as the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, the kings of Egypt called themselves sons of the sun-god. Queen Hatshepsu also, as the fragment of a text found by Naville at Dêr el-Bâhari informs us, claimed to have been born of Amon. But it is of Amonhotep III. of the Eighteenth Dynasty that the fullest statement has yet been found. His mother, says the inscription, was still a virgin when the god of Thebes 'incarnated himself,' so that she might 'behold him in his divine form.' And then the god himself, addressing the virgin-mother, says, 'Amon-hotep is the name of the son who is in thy womb. He shall grow up according to the words that proceed out of thy mouth. He shall exercise sovereignty and righteousness in this land unto its very end. My soul is in him, [and] he shall wear the twofold crown of royalty, ruling the two worlds like the sun for ever.'