

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

His one enthusiasm is reading aloud. 'In the human voice there is an indescribable something that is communicated to man, affecting him in the profoundest part of his nature. This corresponds, in a way, to what in physics are called synchronous vibrations. Reader and listeners thrill in unison; the emotion of the former is even strengthened by that of the latter, and *vice versa*. Now, this phenomenon takes place under the influence of the mind whose work is being called forth. It is the author who now lives in them; it is his love of truth and beauty, the secret spring of his thoughts, that enters the soul of his devoted listeners. And so the reader causes the author not merely to be

understood, but also to be loved. At the sound of his voice the written language loses whatever obscure, material element it may possess and becomes a pure symbol; it allows itself to be assimilated in an ever greater degree by souls that seek each other, and ends by becoming nothing less than the connecting link between these souls themselves.

Dann geht die Seelenkraft dir auf,
Wie spricht ein Geist zum andern Geist.

Faust's words are realized. Whilst the whole body thrills, the gates of the soul open wide and spirit communes with spirit.'

The Danger of Mares' Nests in Theology.

BY THE REV. A. E. GARVIE, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF NEW COLLEGE, LONDON.

III.

1. IN Germany more than in England as yet has *the comparative study of religion* begun to exercise a potent influence on thought about Christianity; and we may close this discussion with some illustrations of 'mares' nests' from this province of human thought. In this *religous-historical* method now dominant in Germany the first article of faith is that Christianity must be treated as all other religions are. That the documents of this religion must be critically examined and appraised as to their literary character and historical value with all possible candour and impartiality goes without saying. No Christian scholar or thinker can desire to withdraw his faith from scrutiny. But beneath this demand, when we have examined more closely what it often results in, we shall discover that there lurks the assumption that all the religions of the world have the same kind of value and validity, although differences in degree may be admitted. Thus Troeltsch refuses to call Christianity the absolute religion, and maintains that it can only be described as, in comparison with other religions, the highest we can conceive (see the writer's *The Christian Certainty amid the Modern Perplexity*, pp. 52 and 57). The principle of the uniformity of nature is thus raised up into the realm of history as equally authoritative there. Now in the region of history, the sphere of human

personality, liberty, genius, progress, variety, to expect resemblance and to suspect difference is an intellectual solecism. Nature and history differ too much to be approached in the same attitude of mind. Most of all in the history of religion, where, if the religious consciousness is not illusive, man comes into contact with absolute, infinite, ultimate reality, is such an assumption likely to mislead and not to guide aright. We should be prepared to learn what the history may teach, and not approach it with any such prejudice.

In assuming then this religious uniformity, this method seeks by a constant comparison with beliefs, rites, and customs in other religions to discredit the distinctiveness and originality of Christianity. The derivation of Paul's view of the Lord's Supper from the mystery religions of paganism may be mentioned as an illustration of this method, the details of which may be studied in Professor Kennedy's articles in the *Expositor* for 1910. In such comparisons three defects may be detected. *In the first place*, the error of the old dogmatics is repeated; the religions of the world are searched for common features, and these are presented in isolation from their context in the common religious life to which they belong, although in that context they may be seen to have a significance that modifies, if it does not altogether remove,

the apparent resemblance. *Faith* does not mean exactly the same in Habakkuk as it does in Paul's quotation; and even Paul and James do not give the same content to the word. Still more cautious must we be in assigning the same significance to a rite in savage and in civilized, in pagan and in Christian, religion. Similarities are often more apparent than real. *Secondly*, even if elements are found in Christian thought and life that are found in other religions, that does not necessarily mean the moral and spiritual equivalence of Christianity and other religions. What do these elements become in Christianity? Is their value enhanced? Do they convey more divine truth and grace to Christian faith than they elsewhere contain? *Thirdly*, these resemblances are usually in features that are common to it with other faiths, the universal human aspect of all religions; but this does not exclude the reality of other elements, qualitatively higher, which are unshared by other religions,—such as, for instance, the personality of Christ Himself—and the influence of these higher elements, which lift up even what is common to a higher moral and spiritual level. To make so much of resemblances as to give the impression that there are no differences is to palter with the truth.

2. But the method is sometimes pushed farther, and not only resemblance, but even direct dependence, is insisted on. The most notorious example of this extreme is the view of Drews, that no historical Jesus existed, and that the origin of Christianity is to be traced to a Christ-myth, the belief in a dying and reviving God. Regarding such a theory, even were its negation of the historical reality of Jesus proved, as almost all responsible scholars agree it is not, three questions must be pressed. *Firstly*, Did the myth exist at the time when Christianity is supposed to have originated? Of this there is nothing that can be called evidence, only conjecture. *Secondly*, Was the myth known in the circles to which Christianity may be historically traced? The New Testament betrays a Jewish environment, in which such a pagan myth, even if it existed, would not find a congenial soil in which to take root and grow. *Thirdly*, when both questions can be met only with conjecture we must ask, Can Christianity not be explained by the data that the New Testament presents to us? If it can, it is only the vagary of pretended scholarship to ignore the explanation

that lies at hand, and to go on a wild-goose chase after another.

CONCLUSION.

1. As these instances, it is hoped, have shown, the study of Christian theology is beset by many perils at the present moment. All sorts of plausible theories to explain it, or more often to explain it away, are in circulation, and are eagerly welcomed by the unstable minds that are only too common even among professed Christian teachers. What can save us from these dangers? What can protect us from making fools of ourselves in the discovery of mares' nests? There seem to be these safeguards. *Firstly*, we should discipline our minds in accuracy of knowledge and exactness of thought in any realm in which we may be seeking assistance in the interpretation of the Christian faith. Such a discipline of mind as will preserve our sanity of judgment must be our aim. *Secondly*, we should suspect new theories that display too marvellous ingenuity in the combination of their data, and betray the ambition in their authors to be startlingly original. *Thirdly*, we should treat with the respect that it deserves the great mass of reverent, serious, and responsible Christian scholarship that has an unbroken tradition within the Christian Church. There are advances in knowledge and in thought, but not violent breaches with the mental inheritance. Yet there are many persons to-day who eagerly snatch up new views, and are content to be ignorant of the growth of Christian truth within the Church. *Lastly*, our own Christian experience is the witness in ourselves of what Christ is and does, by which we must test any theory of what kind it is.

2. By this is not meant a pragmatism which seeks to be relieved of the labour of thought, and wants a short cut to truth. We do want a *philosophy*; but it must be a philosophy that leaves room for all the moral and religious facts—sin and redemption, man's need and God's grace. The *personalism* to which reference has already been made seems alone adequate to Christian experience. We do want to use *psychology* as much as possible to bring our religious consciousness to clearest and fullest self-consciousness; only we must be constantly on our guard against inadequate categories of thought, which do not represent, but misrepresent, the reality with which we are concerned. We do want to pursue the *comparative study of*

religion; for it has much to teach us both as to the solidarity of mankind in religious necessity and aspiration, and also as to the distinctiveness of Christianity as the only adequate satisfaction of the soul of man. Let our mind be a well-ordered inn, where many guests of reputable character are

welcomed and entertained; but let it not sink to be a casual ward, where the vagrants can seek shelter. 'Quench not the spirit; despise not prophesyings; prove all things; hold fast that which is good; abstain from every appearance of evil.'

In the Study.

Cura Curarum.

BY THE REV. A. F. TAYLOR, M.A., ST. CYRUS.

'THE heart that tries to sustain itself upon human commendation will discover with bitterness that the demand will ever increase. There is no more certain cause of depression than the accepting of lower satisfactions.'—A. W. ROBINSON, *Personal Life of Clergy*.

'On one occasion when I was going to preach a Lent course in Paris, Francis was bidding me pay little heed to the world's opinion, and he illustrated his advice by the following anecdote. The Superior of a convent committed the charge of the convent clock to a certain old man who wanted something to occupy him. But ere long he complained that he had never been given a more troublesome or vexatious charge. "What! winding up the weights twice a day?" exclaimed the Superior in amazement. "Oh no! it is not that; it is that I am so worried on all sides. If the clock is a few minutes slow, the students from within are down upon me; and then if to please them I put it on a few minutes, the other students grumble and say our time is fast. Perhaps I put it back to silence their complaints, and the others begin again, till my poor head might as well be the clapper of the bell itself—I am so bothered with the whole thing."

'The Superior comforted the poor old man by telling him to give kind words to all, but meanwhile to let the clock be and not try to adapt its time to one or two.

"Now you will be exposed to all manner of criticisms," Francis went on to say, "and if you trouble yourself as to what is said to you, there will be no end of it. Your course must be to be courteous to everybody; but meanwhile go your own way, be rational, do not try to follow all the

contradictory advice you are certain to receive, fix your mind on God, and follow the leading of His grace. We ought to care little for men's judgment, since our object is not to please them; He sees into the most hidden corners of our hearts."—BISHOP OF BELLEY.

'When you have been preaching, beware of the empty applause poured out upon you. What eloquence! What learning! Such a memory! Such grace! It is delightful to listen!—and the like, all this empty chatter coming forth from empty brains. So Jerome says that the Christian preacher should not cultivate the artifices of rhetoric, but content himself with the simplicity of fishermen, *i.e.* the Apostles; and if St. Paul condemns *listeners* who have itching ears, how much more does he condemn those *preachers* whose aim is to tickle such ears with fanciful words, choice illustrations, and artistic combinations. But if after a sermon you find a few hearers who cry out with the centurion, Truly this is the Son of God! who have learned to know Christ crucified, and who say of the preacher, It will not be his fault if we do not turn from our evil ways,—this sermon will rise up against us in the last judgment if we do not make good use of the warning. If they have learned the needfulness of penitence, the blessing of holiness, or if their lives give token that the lesson has sunk deep into their hearts, then indeed you may pronounce the preacher to be excellent and able to promote not his own glory but God's, who gives His Holy Spirit to His servant and speaks through him.'—ST. FRANCIS DE SALES.

'A large part of what is called sensational preaching is simply the effort of a man who has no faith in his office or in the essential power of truth to keep himself before people's eyes by some kind of