

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 *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

THE
INDIAN
JOURNAL
OF
THEOLOGY

Articles on Christian Initiation

The Christian Faith and Natural
Science

Catholic Missions in the
Early Centuries

Volume Three Number One

March 1954

Book Reviews

A Theologian on Natural Science

(Books by Prof. Karl Heim: *Christian Faith and Natural Science*, translated by N. Horton Smith; *The Transformation of the Scientific World View*, translated by W. A. Whitehouse. S.C.M. Press, 21/- each. Both available from the Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 5 Russell Street, Calcutta).

God Transcendent, the first volume of Prof. Karl Heim's great work *Glaube und Denken*, first appeared in its German form in 1931. Not all the succeeding volumes have appeared in English, but we have reason to be grateful to the S.C.M. for publishing these volumes (4 and 5 of the series) which show this tireless thinker pressing his enquiry into the realms of the most modern scientific thought. The final volume has now made its appearance in German under the title, *Weltschöpfung und Weltende*. It is to be hoped that it also will shortly appear in an English dress.

On page 29 of the first of these volumes, Dr. Heim says:

'The Church's future today depends more than ever on whether she withdraws into the ghetto and leaves the world to its fate or whether she has the authority to continue the discussion with the world outside and to answer the questions which it puts to her.'

Dr. Heim fears that the Church, instead of entering into a conversation with the world, may be satisfied to conduct a monologue with herself. Let it be said that at no time in his long career has Dr. Heim himself fallen victim to this danger. He has maintained that intimate contact with everyday reality which has equipped him to be a preacher whose sermons rallied a bewildered people after the defeat of 1918 and again in the nihilism which threatened after another debacle in 1945, and whose message of the transcendent power of God filled the *StiftsKirche* of Tübingen in the days of Adolf Hitler's threat to the Confessional Church and filled also his class-room with five hundred and more students of every Faculty in those days, to hear this Professor of Theology who spoke of the things which really endure.

This is the man who has now set himself the task of finding the language in which the Church can converse with the world, the scientific world of our day, and, though every scientist will not accept all that he has to say, he will at least understand the language and will know that Dr. Heim is speaking of things that are real.

The first of these volumes is more general in its intention than the second. Its aim is to find a 'Basis of discussion', a manner of speaking of the Christian faith which will be intelligible to a person of scientific training. This he does not by seeking to make religious truth something which can be 'demonstrated' by the methods of pure observation which are the technique of natural science, but by inviting the scientist to

recognize on his own ground the limitations of that technique and by pressing the questions which demand an answer, beyond those which mere observation of the objective world can supply.

We are confronted by facts such as the following: (1) Science itself has realized that there can be no observation of an objective world without an observer, but the observer is precisely the being which cannot be observed. Yet modern science is further than ever from being able to speak about the 'Thing in itself' the postulate of whose very existence is an act of faith. (2) That which can be observed is always that which *has happened*, and yet, as Dr. Heim says, the 'Now' is 'the red-hot forge where the future is to be hammered into shape'. It is the vital moment but it can never be observed; it can only be experienced. (3) Scientific study which has penetrated beyond the idea of dead matter into the thrilling world of nuclear physics has discovered a world like that described by Madame Curie: 'Seemingly rigid material is the scene of births, murderous clashes and acts of self-annihilation. It is the scene of life and death'.

In a world suggested by such facts as these, we cannot set aside the personal as irrelevant, and it is the personal which concerns the ultimate meaning of the whole. At this point Dr. Heim again introduces the suggestion worked out in his first volume, that the element of the personal may be understood by the category of a new *dimension*. He is at home in the conception of a multi-dimensional universe which has been so fruitful to the investigators of the theory of relativity, who can no longer think in terms of Euclidean space. Heim speaks of the conditions in which we normally live and work as those of 'polar space', that in which each point of time and space is defined by its relation to other points, and in which there is no unmoved point of reference from which all can be observed. Man is cast into this space-time continuum without anchorage, yet the deepest need of his being is to find an Archimedean point of security on which he can build rational meaningful life. The life and death question is that of deliverance from this polarity.

The only ways of deliverance that seem to present themselves are those of pure relativism, which reduces life to the frivolous and makes it a mockery, or of positivism in which man by his own deliberate decision chooses something contingent and makes it absolute, as the National Socialist chose to absolutize the German State. The answer to such titanism has invariably been that which was expressed long ago in Scripture in the casting down of the Tower of Babel.

Against this background Dr. Heim sets forth the Scriptural revelation which speaks of the Eternal God, the Creator, in whose hands are all things, who alone 'hath immortality', who is beyond our polar space. To express this truth in the language which he is using, Heim now speaks of God as a 'supra polar space'. He has introduced a new dimension which not only makes possible many of the things which were impossible in our polar existence, but which is delivered from the insoluble dilemma of all that is polar. God then is not a Being who is located on a Mount Olympus or a Kailash, but is the God of Psalm 139 who has beset us behind and before, the God also who is not confined to our time series but who is the same 'yesterday, today and forever'.

Towards the end of the volume Dr. Heim points to the Gospel record of Jesus Christ whose words are spoken with an authority which emerges from that ultimate point of repose at the heart of the universe, and who

brings to men the assurance that their life is not arbitrary, relative, meaningless, but is rather a commission entrusted to them from the Lord of all.

The Transformation of the Modern Scientific World View goes on to a more detailed study of the developments of science in various fields. The quest, however, remains the same, being concerned with the nature of God. Again we are reminded of the necessity for rational life that a man should find something in which he can place complete reliance. Luther is quoted as pointing out that this need of man is that which gives him always either God or an idol. From this starting point Dr. Heim refers us to certain absolutes in which men have in fact placed reliance, namely: the absolute object, absolute space and time, and absolute causality. He then shows how each of these in turn has been dissolved not by philosophical or theological argument but by the sheer compulsion of scientific investigation. To the materialist the 'absolute object', the eternity of matter, is the foundation of his faith, but today the scientist who has penetrated towards the inner secrets of the electrons can only say 'the world does not be, it becomes'. When we turn to space and time we see how the relentless advance of theory tested by observation has made the idea of absolutes inconceivable. Man has been driven from one point of reference to another—the solid earth, the central sun, the postulate of the ether—till finally no security remains! And absolute causality has gone. The optimistic suggestion of Laplace who was sure that a mind of sufficient ability, given full information about the situation in the universe, could forecast accurately every future event by the law of causality, has been shattered by the apparently arbitrary behaviour of the structure of the atom. Where is the mechanism which can explain why a particular radium atom should disintegrate now and not a thousand years hence, and why other radium atoms should *not* disintegrate now?

Dr. Heim sums up this analysis in these words:

'Each time we see a new variation on the same process by which the absolute raised against God by men is destroyed. The destruction is not achieved by apologetic methods practised by priests and philosophers in defence of their dogmas. The altars built by men as their places of devotion are demolished from within by the process of discovery which goes forward irresistibly to embrace new aspects of reality' (p. 152).

Before he draws his final conclusions, Dr. Heim turns our attention to 'the Riddle of Life' quoting from the realm of biology some astounding examples of the life-cycle—for example the story of the *sitaris beetle*—which make any mechanistic theory of evolution and the old adage *natura non fecit saltus* completely untenable and remind us that the word 'instinct' is but our symbol 'x' to point to mysteries utterly beyond our understanding.

This study is not put forward as a claim to *prove* the being or existence of God but it is the context in which Dr. Heim again reminds us of the nature of the biblical faith. This is the world in which the Lord Jesus meets us with His serene confidence that even the fall of the sparrow does not happen without the Father. How striking is this fact that Jesus does not point to the abnormal or spectacular to illustrate the omnipotence of God but to the most insignificant events. The modern parallel, which Dr. Heim suggests, is that there is not a quantum jump without the Father. In the face of the problem of life, the faith of the

Lord Jesus assures us that we have not received our life from the hands of an impersonal 'It' but rather that it is a commission from Him in whom the life lines of all His creatures intersect. This gives to it its meaning and its purpose and responsibility.

Readers of Dr. Heim's books should be prepared for certain lines of thought which they may find strange. For instance, in vol. 4, he suggests a universality not only of life but of consciousness which many will find it hard to accept. Again, his awareness of the mystery of evil leads to a stress on the 'demonic' which a sophisticated world thought it had outgrown till some of the horrors of modern division and warfare came to make it not quite so sure. Again in a book which ranges over such a vast field of scientific knowledge, in which progress of study is unceasing, it is not to be expected that every statement will go unchallenged. These facts, however, do not detract from the truly magnificent achievement of a theologian who has shown such ability to master these varied subjects and who has had the patience and the humility to labour so long to understand what the scientists of today have to tell us. Any of these who read this book must at least recognize that here is a writer who has taken them seriously and who seeks to speak their language. It is to be hoped that they will have the patience to return the compliment and to recognize that when he also calls upon the work of philosophers he is still talking intelligible sense, and above all that when he propounds in this context the Christian faith he has not retreated into obscurantism but is saying something profoundly relevant to the world in which we dwell.

This article has barely scratched the surface of the work done in these weighty books. The universities of India today find students pressing more and more into their science faculties, and Christian thought which does not reckon with this fact will be more and more isolated from the thinking of the rising generation. We too must carry on a dialogue with this world. The translators have succeeded to a remarkable degree in reproducing the clarity of Prof. Heim's style, and when we turn his pages we cannot but be grateful that to prepare us for this dialogue we are offered such guidance as these books contain.

W. S.

La Papauté et les Missions au Cours des six Premiers Siècles ; Méthodologie antique et orientations modernes, par And. V. Seumois, O.M.I., M.A., Docteur en Missiologie, 1953. Eglise Vivante, Paris and Louvain.

This study by a distinguished exponent of the science of missions serving in Canada contains much more than the title leads the reader to expect on first opening the book. It falls into two parts and the historical analysis which occupies the first part is in the nature of an introduction to the principles of missionary action which the author develops in the concluding section. His thesis is, in fact, an eloquent plea supported by a superabundant wealth of documents for a return to what he claims to be the authentic missionary policy of the Papacy, the neglect of which during long centuries has resulted in establishing alien religious colonies of Mediterranean Christianity in Asia, Africa and the Western hemisphere rather than in planting branches of the Universal Church fully acclimatized to their environment. In support of this thesis he can appeal to

certain pronouncements of recent occupants of the chair of St. Peter which have affirmed with a startling lack of ambiguity the obligation which rests upon the agents of the Church's mission so to accommodate their presentation of the Christian religion to the diverse races of mankind that all His regenerate children may be at home in the household of God. The challenge was abruptly summarized by Cardinal Constantini when secretary of the Sacred Congregation *de propaganda fide*: 'Let us ask what tactics the missionaries of the apostolic and post-apostolic age followed: do we employ the same methods? The methods we follow are totally different: they seem to us more perfect, but after four centuries of experience they have proved themselves all but sterile.'

The Roman tradition that St. Peter was the first Pope enables Fr. Seumois to begin his historical investigation with the Apostles. As he notes, the missionary character of the Prince of Apostles has been overshadowed by the vocation of St. Paul. The chapter in which he seeks to supply this deficiency concludes with an illuminating discussion of the clash which occurred between the two Apostles at Antioch as typifying the inevitable tension which arises when concern for the Church's unity comes into collision with concern for its universality. Subsequent chapters survey the very scanty evidence of missionary activity on the part of the early Bishops of Rome,—the author is too good an historian to give any credence to legend—and there is a judicious examination of those elements in the theology of St. Leo the Great which are relevant to the missionary vocation of the Church. One of his immediate predecessors, Innocent I, by his insistence on conformity to Roman usages in his dealings with other churches of the West foreshadows the Papal monarchy of the Middle Ages.

During the closing years of the 6th century the Papacy in the person of Gregory the Great assumed the direction of the Church's missionary activity. By organizing the mission of St. Augustine to the Anglo-Saxons Pope Gregory inaugurated a new era in which the Church of Rome became the headquarters of Christian missions. For the spiritual conquest of the English nation not only marked the beginning of the missionary labours of the Benedictine Order, but the Anglo-Saxon Church repaid the debt she owed to Rome a century later by sending a host of zealous evangelists to the continent who organized the churches they planted in dependence on the Holy See. But this by no manner of means exhausts the significance of Gregory as the first of the great missionary Popes. He watched with minute and paternal solicitude over the progress of the mission and displayed a large-hearted tolerance in the instructions he gave St. Augustine, bidding him when perplexed by the diversity of rites he found in the course of his travels prevailing among those who professed the same faith as his home-church to select from these whatever seemed best adapted to the mentality of his converts and even directing him to wean them from idolatry by transforming the pagan sacrifices into Christian observances and vowing the ancient sanctuaries to the worship of the true God. Fr. Seumois is at pains to show that Gregory was led to enunciate these maxims not in a spirit of opportunism but by pondering such passages of scripture as Leviticus 17:1-7 and by his insight into human motive. In virtue of these oft-quoted directions, to which Anglicans have not infrequently appealed as a justification for their existence, echoed as they seem to be in Article XXXIV, he acclaims the great Pope as one of the most outstanding exponents of the authentic

missionary policy of the Papacy, 'un phare d'une exceptionnelle puissance dans le domaine de la missiologie'.

Gregory excelled as a practical theologian: his writings were probably more widely read during the Middle Ages even than those of his master, Augustine. But many factors militated against his plea for freedom of local development receiving due attention—the wholesale conversions of the Middle Ages due to the intervention of the secular arm, the influence of the Canon Law in favour of uniformity, the chief blame for which Fr. Seumoï fastens on the False Decretals, and later the imperialism of the Iberian powers during the period of colonization. In his last three chapters the author develops at length the argument for a return to the policy of the ancient Papacy so as to enable the Church to adjust itself to the situation which confronts it in the modern world in the fulfilment of its apostolic vocation untrammelled by the crippling tyranny of tradition. He confines himself to a detailed examination of three points which he urges have hitherto been too widely ignored—Canonical Flexibility, Liturgical Adaptation and the Baptism of Indigenous Values—and adduces an impressive array of historical precedents in support of his thesis. For in its direction of the Church's mission the Papacy has never entirely yielded to the inveterate tendency to latinize the churches of its obedience: well-known instances of such latitude are the official sanction accorded to the liturgical use of Slavonic in Moravia in the 9th century, of Mongolian in China in the 14th and of literary Chinese in the 17th and Fr. Seumoï quotes the less well-known instance of the permission granted to the Carmelite missionaries in Persia to celebrate mass in Arabic. These last two examples belong to the age in which the Propaganda was established. In its early years the congregation issued statesmanlike instructions on the respect due to national cultures and customs in the work of propagating the faith, but a variety of causes combined to defeat these enlightened counsels and they were finally abandoned during the acrimonious controversy about the rites which agitated the missionary outposts of the Church in Asia at the beginning of the 18th century. The author's argument is further reinforced by quoting the judgment of non-Roman critics like Dr. K. S. Latourette and the testimony of missionaries in the field and indigenous Christians to the obstacles which the faith encounters through the exotic guise in which it is presented.

The theme of this book is one that is highly relevant to the situation which confronts the Church in India at the present juncture. The achievement of political independence inevitably impresses on Christians the need to emphasize the uniqueness of the religion they profess. For though the Indian republic has given its assent to liberty of conscience, there is no gainsaying that the national culture is largely under the influence of one dominating religion. And there are already signs that the demand that Christianity should express its faith and worship in an idiom more congenial to the people of India is becoming less aggressive and more discriminating. It is perhaps significant that Fr. Seumoï derives a not inconsiderable part of the evidence he urges in support of his thesis from the experience of the Church in China. He makes no allusion to the leniency which Roman missionaries were not alone in displaying towards Caste in South India in the 18th century and this is perhaps the most conspicuous warning against the perils inherent in a policy of accommodation. The problem of acclimatization is indeed

highly complex. It is not improbable that in India in the years to come it will hinge on two questions to which Fr. Seumois alludes incidentally in the course of his argument. The first is a practical perplexity of conscience, namely what degree of concession in regard to attendance at the public and private ceremonies of their non-Christian fellow countrymen is legitimate for Christians in a country where the sacred and the social are so intimately fused? There are not a few outside the Roman allegiance who regard with grave misgiving the authorizations granted to Japanese and Chinese members of the Roman Church to participate in State Shinto rites and ceremonies in honour of Confucius and departed ancestors. The other question concerns the Church's evangelistic approach to the cultured classes. Fr. Seumois quotes the example of the early Fathers who expounded the faith in the language of Plato, Plotinus and the Stoics. But, surely, this is a precedent which needs to be applied with great caution. The Stoics at least had this affinity with Christianity that they held fast to the idea of an immutable divine law of right and wrong inherent in the universe and there have been Christian thinkers in later centuries who have regarded the Platonick philosophy as the 'old loving nurse' of Christianity without deviating from orthodoxy. Do the philosophies of India afford a similar *praeparatio evangelica*? It is at least arguable that they do not. It is perhaps characteristic of a work emanating from the Roman Catholic Church that the author does not touch on the subject of the relation of the Old Testament to the New in which the issue is normally focussed for those who own a different allegiance.

+ NOEL CHOTA NAGPUR

Mythos Differenzierung Selbstinterpretation: By Dr. Gerhard Steege; Herbert Reich, Evangelischer Verlag, G.m.b.h., Hamburg-Volksdorf.

The lively debate on *Entmythologisierung* (Demythologising) started by an essay of Prof. Bultmann of Marburg towards the end of World War II is the most recent of those controversies with which from time to time Germany stirs the theological world. For English readers a clear account of what is involved is given by Prof. Ian Henderson in his *Myth in the New Testament*; while the German series of essays on the subject is now available in English in the volume *Kerygma and Myth* (S.P.C.K. 22/6d.).

It is clearly a mistake to dismiss Prof. Bultmann's theory merely as a new form of discredited liberalism. It is rather the venture of one deeply concerned for the proclamation of the Gospel to the multitudes of our own day for whom Christ died, to whom the thought forms of a bygone age have become incomprehensible. It is thus an attempt at that task of 'translation' which always must involve much more than the mere finding of words and phrases to render the original. In lands in which, for instance, the sheep is an unknown animal, how does one make such a phrase as 'The Lamb of God' or the whole rich biblical imagery of shepherds and sheep to become meaningful? Or in the large areas of Bengal in which no stone is to be found even large enough to fill one's hand nor any hill to break the horizon, how does one speak of a 'rock in a weary land' or of the faith which can remove mountains? Yet these are but simple examples of the demand made today on the preacher of the Gospel who must distinguish between its vital message and the forms

But one cannot be satisfied with the many loose ends which this particular volume leaves. Thus one is very doubtful about the complete division he contemplates among men of today between those to whom myth is still meaningful and those to whom it is not. There have been modern 'myths' which challenge that sharp distinction and also query the radical way in which the psychology of men is taken to have developed. Again, when he not only recognizes that religious truth to be effective for me must lay hold on me as a complete person, but also throws the whole weight on the subjective, one must ask how then we are delivered from complete relativity or even illusion. And yet again, with the relativizing of all authority, one is not convinced by the particular means by which the writer still seeks to retain Scriptural authority as the 'norm' of our faith. The question which he has left unanswered is the vital one of historicity, and it is impossible to feel that an interpretation is faithful to the heart of the *Kerygma* which is not much more explicit in its acceptance of the stubborn historical emphasis of the Bible and especially of the fact of the Resurrection to which very little attention is given here.

The men who are wrestling with this problem of 'demythologizing' are asking important questions, but it is not possible to see how the central truth of the great things God has done can be preserved without the fabric of the revelation of that truth which is in Scripture.

W. S.

Christianity and Social Planning. With special reference to the Five-Year Plan of India.

This Bulletin is a first attempt of the 'Christian Institute for the study of Society' to study the first Five-Year Plan of India from the standpoint of Christian faith and conviction. It comprises four articles written by four eminent Christian social thinkers of our country. The first of these deals mainly with the historical background of social planning, or, rather of economic planning in other countries, especially U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. The next article gives a bird's-eye view of India's Five-Year Plan (1951-56). It lays special emphasis on the Community Development Project and the National Extension Services, the two main props of rural planning in the Plan. A brief appraisal of the Plan concludes this article.

Mr. Hector Abhayavardhan presents an admirable article on 'A Socialist Evaluation of the Plan.' The Socialist is a formidable critic of any economic and social planning under a mixed economy. 'At best what the Five-Year Plan seeks to achieve is not the planning of the economy of India but what the Cambridge economist Maurice Hobb called the 'steering' of the economy in certain directions. Steering is an entirely different matter from planning . . . ' Planning, however, is not the mere allocation of budgetary expenditure, but the sum of *production planning, financial planning and price planning*. The writer shows that the weakest point of India's Five-Year Plan is its financial provision which besides taxation and public borrowing, counts upon foreign aid and deficit financing, the two uncertain and potentially dangerous fair-weather friends of the Plan.

The last essay on 'Christianity and Social Planning' by Rev. J. Russell Chandran, represents the Christian standpoint to Social Planning in general as well as the Christian evaluation of the Five-Year Plan of India. The Bible provides ample material for a definite conception of a

planned society in the history of Israel. 'When we read Leviticus, Chapters 19-25, we cannot miss the fact that the Hebrews had a definite view about the holding of land ' Justice and Mercy were the dominant themes of the 'eighth century' Prophets. It is the teaching of such Prophets that found expression in the later legal codes of Deuteronomy and Leviticus.' In Primitive Christian Communism one of the underlying ideas was that all men belonged to Christ, because He has died for all. Mr. Reinhold Niebuhr has rightly said that sin makes democracy necessary and the Grace of God makes democracy possible. The primary task of the Christian Church in India is to create democracy, rather than to preserve a democracy which we already have.

'The Christian aim should be to build up cells of true Community living as a means of humanizing the impersonal relationships of modern large societies.'

R. N. D.

Daily Bible Readings: Published for the Church of South India by the Oxford University Press. (Re.1).

This scheme of Daily Bible Readings, recently published by the Synod Liturgy Committee of the C.S.I. is well thought out, and is worthy of a warm welcome.

It is not easy to criticize it in detail without having access to the table of readings for Sundays, which may contain passages which tend to be overlooked in this scheme ;—Jonah, for instance, is relegated to the fourth 'Extra Week', and consequently appears once in about seven years. The table of these 'Extra Weeks' in the Introduction is a little puzzling at first glance, as it is not clearly explained that the Extra Weeks correspond to the number of Sundays between the date in the left-hand column and that on the right.

The compilers have followed an excellent principle in selecting passages from both the Old and New Testaments in such a way as to emphasize the relation of God's mighty acts to the history of His people. In carrying this out the C.S.I. has excluded substantial portions of the Old Testament, but the selection has been wisely made, and there is weighty precedent for excluding the Song of Songs from the Canon!

B. F. P.



Easter

Speaking of Easter, do we not attach more importance nowadays to the act of dying than to death itself? We are much more concerned with getting over the act of dying than with being victorious over death. Socrates mastered the act of dying; Christ overcame death as the *ἐσχάτος ἐχθρός* the last enemy (I Cor. 15:24). There is a real difference between the two things. The one is within capacity, the other implies resurrection.—D. Bonhoeffer: *Letters and Papers from Prison*.