

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE OLD THEOLOGY.

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Is the old theology good enough for to-day? There are many things in it that personally we may not like, some things it asserts we may not accept, but in its intellectual consistency, its logical precision, and its splendid sanity, the old theology compels one's admiration in a way that no form of the new theology does.

The old theology is strong meat for strong men. There is tonic in its fearless assertions, and there is intellectual rest in the unshaken confidence of its ultimate conclusions. Its strength springs from the rock-bottom foundation on which it rests. The new theologies make much of experience and the religious consciousness, but both of these things have in them the elements of uncertainty and transition, since every age creates its own experience and develops its own religious consciousness. But the old theology goes back of these things and digs down to the rock-bottom of Scripture. Taking the Bible to be what it claims, the inspired revelation of God, the old theology finds in that Book a unity of thought which no later criticism of the Bible has been able to destroy.

The first principle, therefore, of the old theology is not to adapt itself to the experience of man in this or that age, but to render itself consistent with the teachings of Scripture. If science has anything new to say, the old theologian will welcome it, if it is in accordance with Scripture. If criticism has anything to suggest, the old theologian will be glad to consider it, if it is in line with the teachings of Scripture. If the old theology is dogmatic, it is not more so than the Bible. If it takes extreme views of sin, it goes no further than the Bible. If it teaches a doctrine of forgiveness, based on the idea of substitution, it finds confirmation in the expiatory idea of sacrifice, beginning in Genesis and consummated in Revelation.

The old theology is essentially a Christology. Its vision is so permeated with Christ that it begins to discover Him in types, and prophecies and symbolisms all through the older records. Some of its interpretations may seem grotesque and far-fetched, as, for example, its views of the Song of Solomon, but this pervasive vision of the Christ gives a beauty, as well as consistency, to the teachings of the Old Testament, which vitalizes, as well as spiritualizes, its ancient themes.

In its doctrines of God and Man, the old theology is peculiarly strong, because it safeguards the personality of both. While it may unduly separate the divine and the human to an extent that the later teachings of Jesus hardly justified, it has, by that very fact, vindicated the value of moral distinctions between man as the sinner, estranged from God, and man as the child, redeemed through Christ.

The old theology is strong because it presents a doctrine of salvation which, in its main elements, is free from metaphysical mysteries. Sin is the great separator between man and God. By some means, unexplainable by human thought, sin has become a disturbing element in the cosmic process, and nature, as well as man, has been involved in its pain. To overcome this element of death, it is necessary that God should interfere. His Holiness demands the extinction of sin; His Love seeks

the salvation of the sinner. In the sacrificial death of Christ, the Eternal Son of God, the guilt of sin is atoned for, and the needs of the sinner are met by the substitution of the Divine Sufferer. The Cross is the keystone in the arch of redemption.

The old theology, therefore, exalts the power of faith as the one supreme instrument through which the Divine Salvation becomes a reality for the sinner. When the sinner becomes the believer, he is saved. And experience confirms this. The old theology, which has, perhaps, been unduly contemptuous of experience, nevertheless finds in the experience of the church its strongest bulwark of support. Its efficiency as an interpreter of the method of salvation has been vindicated in the redeemed lives of men and women. The old theology has been the means of saving more sinners than all the other theologies multiplied over and over again. Its great dynamic of appeal is focussed in its doctrine of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of Holiness, convicting of sin on the one hand, the Spirit of Power, sanctifying the sinner on the other hand.

Is the old theology likely to go? Will the new age, with its new science, its new philosophy, and its new criticism, prove too radical for this old-fashioned view of God and His world? Some things about it we may not like, but in its main line of thought and essential doctrines, the old theology will last so long as man, conscious of sin, feels his need of a Saviour.

There is a good deal of discussion in many quarters over what is called—whether seriously or sarcastically, we cannot say—the “new theology” propounded by Rev. R. L. Campbell, the late Dr. Parker's successor in the City Temple, London, G. B. That system, with its denial of sin, its glorification of man, and its general pantheism, the New Zealand Outlook describes as “a mere cobweb—a cobweb hung with the dew of poetry, and shot through with the sunlight of imagination, but still only a cobweb.” As to Mr. Campbell's course in holding on to his church, which is pledged by its trust to teach the doctrines of the Westminster Confession, the Outlook says: “If the legal principles of the famous judgment which dispossessed the United Free Church were applied to the City Temple, Mr. Campbell would be dismissed from his pulpit with the velocity of a torpedo from its tube. For that he is doctrinally adrift can not be doubted. The contrast betwixt his teaching and that of his strong-brained predecessor, Dr. Parker, is the contrast betwixt a mold of jelly and polished granite. Mr. Campbell is undoubtedly sincere; but he intoxicates himself with his own metaphysics.” As to the question of sin, which Mr. Campbell belittles, our New Zealand contemporary says: “The fact of sin is in the world. Its witness is in every man's conscience; its record is on every page of history and in every issue of the daily papers. Man is the one thing whose nature is the field of deadly strife betwixt the appetites and the conscience. The consciousness of a Fall is burned in on man's spiritual nature. And it is because the Christian system recognizes this dark fact, and provides for it, that it remains the one triumphant faith of the world.” This is as vigorous as it is evangelical.

The more honesty a man has, the less he affects the air of a saint.—Lavater.

CAN A CHRISTIAN BELIEVE IN
EVOLUTION?

At the opening of the present century a vote was taken in one of the London newspapers as to what book it was that had exerted most influence upon the thought of the century just closing. The first place was given to two,—Hegel's “Philosophy of History,” and Darwin's “Origin of Species.” They had this in common, that both aimed at reducing a great body of existing knowledge to order and system. They took facts which had been disconnected in men's observation, and tried to show the connecting reason which bound them into unity. The “Origin of Species” dealt with what had been gathered by the students of vegetable and animal life, and built into an edifice what had seemed a sand-heap.

Not that Darwin was the first who attempted this. Lamarck, among men of science, and even some among the theologians, had taught that the higher forms of organic life were modifications of the lower, produced either by natural law, or by the molding will of a Creator. It was Darwin's achievement to set forth a single law which was supposed to explain everything. This law was the pressure of environment on the organism. The constant and rapid multiplication of organic forms produces a struggle for the means of living. In this “struggle for existence” the result is “the survival of the fittest,” or an evolution of those forms of life which are most capable of holding their own through increase of intelligence and consequent adaptability.

The sufficiency of this law was disputed from the first, even by some who believed in evolution. St. George Mivart denied its adequacy to explain the process. Others suggested that the law did not account for any upward movement from the lower to the higher forms, and that its operation might have left the world a mass of lichens or polyps. Others asked why, under the uniform action of a natural law, all organisms had not been developed, giving us a world of men alone without any forms of less-developed life. At first these objectors got scant hearing, but in later years the objections to the Darwinian theory, some of them, very technical, have so increased in weight and number that most of the believers in evolution could not be classed as Darwinians. On the other hand, it is beyond question that the diffusion of that theory owes much to Mr. Darwin, and that since the publication of “The Origin of Species” in 1859, there has been an increased tendency to bring the facts of biologic and even social science into a scheme of evolution. Herbert Spencer's philosophy is an attempt to do this on a grand scale, and had a great vogue for a while, but it also has lost its currency as an explanation of the universe.

Whether or not any form of the evolutionary theory is logically reconcilable with Christian faith, it is certain that pure Darwinism is not so. It requires us to believe that the triumph of the strong over the weak is the method of God's leading, and that a law of universal selfishness rules the universe. It sets forth as the fundamental law of all life a principle of selfish and relentless struggle, which cannot be brought into harmony with the Sermon on the Mount. Hence the attacks upon that sermon in our times, as an “iridescent dream,” whereas it once was the part of the Bible which even the sceptics agreed to admire without reserves. Hence also