

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php



THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE GENESIS OF REGINALD CAMPBELL'S
THEOLOGY.

BY THE REVEREND HENRY A. STIMSON, D.D.

WE have fairly credible authority for believing that there is nothing new under the sun, and there is certainly very little that is original. Goethe, one of the most original, and quite the most fertile, mind of his times, was very fond of proclaiming his indebtedness to others. He delighted to recount the names of those he regarded as his great teachers.

When, therefore, any man breaks out in the theological world with ideas that are startling in doctrine, or statements that are so novel as to challenge wide attention, it is well to seek their origin in some source back of the speaker. The personal equation may be more or less significant. There may be something in time or place that colors them, but their roots run elsewhere. Consciously or unconsciously the speaker is yielding to outside influences, and pretty surely casting in the mold of his own expressions ideas that have a quite independent history.

How far Reginald Campbell may be the exponent of the new theology is an open question. There certainly is a new theology, vigorous and fruitful. It is expressed in many a new

book from a widely-spread group of young writers on the other side of the Atlantic, who show themselves well taught in the schools of to-day, and have spiritual insight and adequate Christian experience. Mr. Campbell's doctrines are not found in them, and may be regarded as a kind of sporadic outbreak, or as a volcanic explosion of pent-up subterranean forces. In any case they are spectacular, and command the attention of a multitude of people. They are certainly worth examination.

We have perhaps hardly the adequate data for taking them up in detail. Indeed, in the opinion of some of his best friends, the preacher has not yet altogether found himself, and does not know—as his friends do not know—where he will end. But in two fundamental doctrines he seems to have taken definite positions. They are so important that everything else becomes only corollary,—his doctrine of God, and his doctrine of Sin. He holds that not only is God in man, but that in some real sense man is God. The doctrine of the divine immanence, which has always played along the borders of pantheism, has taken on this peculiar form: God and man are so merged that all that man does is the working of God in him; consequently sin is a blundering effort to find God. It is the expression of the repressed and suppressed nature of man trying to disclose itself, and to reach forth to the attainment of its fullest possibilities and desires.

The error of pantheism is its elimination of personality from the Deity. This teaching practically eliminates personality from man. The ancient contest between determinism and freedom of the will, which, in modern times, under the influence of the new science, has become so acute, here takes on a new form. By robbing sin of its specific character as transgression of known law, its moral quality is eradicated, and so much of personality as is bound up in conscious free-

dom of the will vanishes. Man may not be regarded as an automaton operated by natural forces, but he becomes something other than a man, as expressing only the divine. Whatever he does must ultimately be right, because it is only a move in the game, the release of a cog in the machinery of the divine plan.

This is the doctrine in the last analysis. It carries with it inevitably the upheaval of ethics, as it is commonly understood, and a necessary universalism in eschatology. What then is the genesis of the new teaching? How are we rightly to estimate it?

There are no more potent names in the thinking of the century than Schleiermacher and Hegel. Multitudes who never heard of them are under their spell, and multitudes gratefully acknowledge their direct debt to them. Schleiermacher's great contribution¹ to modern thinking was his application to religion of the great thought which constituted the Romantic movement, that characterizes the close of the eighteenth century, the doctrine of the significance and the sufficiency of individuality, that specific endowment of feeling, thought, imagination, etc., which goes to make us severally the men we are. The eighteenth century set men free as individuals. It released them from the bondage of absorption in either the church or the state. The nineteenth century was charged at the outset with the distinct problem of every man as in himself an individuality, a special being with a life and function all his own. The *Aufklärung*, as the Germans called it, the Illumination which marked the opening of the nineteenth century, was the result of this discovery. It quickened

¹ My presentation of Schleiermacher's position is drawn from the account of his latest expositor, Dr. Oman, in his "Problem of Faith and Freedom," from which I have freely quoted in giving it this application.

every form of human activity and thought. The problems of government, of social order, of philosophy, of art, of literature, of theology, with which the world is occupied to-day, took shape then. It was the beginning of a new epoch. Its roots of course are in the past. But it constitutes a distinct movement. The new world that opened three centuries before in the Protestant Reformation had in fact only cleared the ground and come to its appointed task at this later date.

Pietism in Germany and the Evangelical revival in England had broken stiff and icy orthodoxy, and swept aside stark and dry rationalism. The new sense of the value of the inner man, and the new sense of freedom of the spirit which showed itself in every direction, in poetry, in music, in art, Schleiermacher applied in a thoroughgoing way in religion. Individuality is the dominant thought. Religion is not a "mere compendium of doctrines about God of a kind to influence morals," it is a vital, original, and fundamental element in human nature, a part of man's native endowment, the basis of an ultimate whole which appears in the midst of the infinite variety. Man is in touch with the Infinite. In that relation he confirms and completes his being: he comes to himself: he attains his full freedom and individuality. As in his relation to his fellows and to God he gives utterance to his deepest feelings, he expresses *himself*. Each man is a distinct manifestation of the Infinite. "In him a portion of the Infinite consciousness here divides itself off, and, as a finite being, links itself to one definite movement in the sense of organic evolution." The Infinite is endlessly at work expressing itself in all the variety of individual men. The point is almost reached of *identifying* the divine and the human, so largely is the revelation of God to be sought in man.

On the other hand, feeling becomes the response of man

to God. It is the inter-communion, not of alien elements, but of the Infinite with the human spirit, of the soul of the universe with the soul of man. It is described as "fleeting and strange as the dew on a blossom, bashful and tender as a maiden's kiss, holy and fruitful as a bridal embrace." "It fills no time and fashions nothing palpable, yet is a holy wedlock of the universe with reason incarnated in man." "Being immediate, it is above error, and by laying man directly on the bosom of the Infinite World, it communicates every original movement in his life."

Out of this conception came the efflorescence which in art, in literature, in society, blossomed, as we all know. The meaning of the value of life lies in the fullness of its experiences. Nothing is so much to be dreaded as lack of emotion, of experience, of thrill. The door is flung wide to the realism which has produced the writings of the de Goncourts, of Zola, and the rest, and has given vogue to the modern stage. It underlies the restlessness, the endless craving for excitement, of modern life. It defines a course in which we have reached a stage where we have largely lost all capacity of moral shock.

Theologically it is always on the verge of pantheism, the pit into which that mysticism inevitably falls which sinks religion in inner feelings, and translates God in terms of self-expression, regarding man as only a part of an infinite whole.

Schleiermacher "maintains that religion is not in itself either doctrine or morals. A system of doctrine is only an attempt to review the province of religion, while in respect to morals, everything should be done with religion but nothing *for* religion." "The ideas, for example, of God and of immortality are not immediate religious impressions, but interpretations involving doctrinal and moral elements." "Feel-

ings are to be trusted as possibly direct and intuitive," while "ideas, or doctrines, are likely to be anthropomorphic and misleading."

"Religion in this sense cannot of course be taught any more than artistic sense can be taught. It is a matter of direct apprehension or perhaps of native endowment. It cannot be set in a formula as knowledge, but is a fundamental relation of life. Others can help us to grasp it by quickening in us its exercise. The value of Christ lies in this. We need a religious mediator or interpreter for the transfiguration of our intuition of humanity. A higher character must be found in man to relate him to the universe. Every religion has sighed for something outside and above humanity to fashion and take possession of it. When within the limits of humanity divine nature is met, this aspiration is satisfied. So Christ remains of abiding value for mankind, both through the clearness with which the original intuition of alienation and reconciliation was realized in him, and through the new impulse imparted to the race."

According to Schleiermacher, the natural and the supernatural merge. The confusions and antagonisms of this life only exist in time. God is beyond the region of antithesis, beyond contrasts and oppositions, beyond the whole strife between good and evil in which we now live. The bad, he argues, is a necessary part of the good. The good could only come into action through the ability of man to come forward with what is in him; and that involves the possibility of evil. It becomes more than a possibility as if evil were a necessity for finite creatures, an unavoidable stage in their development. The bad, being in this way only a consequence of what is good, is, in a sense, not from God, and as the good develops it will disappear. In the luxuriant expan-

sion of the individuality in the Romanticists' idea of freedom, sin becomes only a "restriction of the consciousness of God." Truth and the free spirit are identical. Sin is incident to the struggle to attain the reality of freedom. The creative element is feeling, the ultimate fact is spirit, and the goal for humanity is the common life of the human and the divine.

When we come to ask how freedom is attained, and in what it really consists, which is the crux of every philosophical system, the weakness of the whole Romantic movement, as Dr. Oman points out, becomes apparent. Freedom with Schleiermacher, as with Hegel, is a result of progressive development rather than a work of purpose and endeavor. It comes with advancing culture. It is an evolutionary product, rather than a gift of the grace of God. In contrast, freedom, as the liberty of the sons of God, is a goal attainable only in an atmosphere flooded with Jesus Christ, by men who, in Paul's phrase, are "in Christ." The story of Christ given in the New Testament, and the kind of life prescribed for followers of Christ in the New Testament, with its daily conquest of the world within and without, furnish the test of its reality and the description of the means by which it is to be attained. We recognize throughout the teaching of Schleiermacher, as in that of his followers and disciples, the truth of what Ritschl said about it. There is a feeling that the whole system is "in the air."

I am not attempting to compass Schleiermacher's position or to estimate his entire work. The impulse he gave to theological and religious thought was immense. It was expanded in Hegel, and passed through him into the new science of the century. It is witnessed to on all sides to-day, particularly among those who stand as the representatives of culture and advanced thought. It furnishes the molds for

many a new coinage, and is the hand, whether you call it "dead" or "living," upon many a writer and speaker who is all unconscious of the influence. It makes inevitable Dr. George Gordon's universalism, against which in terms he himself protests: it is the inspiration of books like Trines' "In Tune with the Infinite." It is the philosophical conception which may be regarded as walking like a shadow alongside the misty attempts at argument of Christian Science; and in it are to be recognized not only the underlying thoughts, but almost the very expressions, of Reginald Campbell's recent deliverances. The personal element in Campbell goes far to account for his great influence, as it constitutes so large a part of his charm, with all knowledge. But separate the man from the public speech and from the book, and you must see that he has advanced not a step beyond what was in fact the earliest form of Schleiermacher's "Reden über die Religion," and that, so far from its being a new theology, it is old and travel-worn, and while there is that in the human heart which always turns tenderly toward it, it fares ill in the face of the demands of the soul "awake to the sense of personal guilt or striving to interpret to itself the obligations of duty and the moral law as the expression of the character and requirements of a righteous God."

It is already prophetically said that a wide-spread quickening of the religious life like that which followed in Germany upon the overthrow of Napoleon Bonaparte, will be likely again to discover, as that did, that the old confessions have in them spiritual forces of which small trace can be found in this recent and artistically expansive type of intellectual reconstruction of Christianity. "What we need is not a God and religion deduced from life, but a plan of life deduced from God and religion." The difference is vital.