

# 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 Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

(*têrêti*), and the phrase *mudê tertî*, "wise in the law," was current; but the wise men of Babylonia drew their inspiration from omens in the skies and earth, from the examination of a liver, and the observation of the stars, rather than from the Divine "wisdom" of which the Hebrew writer speaks. What a contrast the fact affords between the religious conceptions of Babylonia and Israel!

It is true that the "wise men" of Chaldea were not all of them sorcerers or astrologers, or even interpreters of dreams. There were prophets in the Hebrew sense of the word, as well as law-givers and priests. And through them, also, as we have seen, the *tertu* or "Divine law" was revealed. Isaiah would have had his predecessors in Babylonia when he referred his disciples to the "law" which had been announced through himself (Isa. viii. 15, 20), supposing the Hebrew text in these passages to be right. But this is more than doubtful, since the grammatical construction is difficult to defend, and the reading of the Septuagint is different. In any case, however, the word of the prophet, since it was a "message" from heaven, would have been a *tertu* or *tôrâh*.



## Christian Truth for the Far East.

BY THE VEN. ARCHDEACON MOULE, B.D.

IT would seem probable, from the assertions and proposals of some who regard themselves, no doubt honestly, as friends of the great and fast-awakening Far East, that the extreme and destructive views of Biblical and religious critics are to be transplanted from Christendom to the Eastern lands from which and about which I write, and are to be offered for the consideration of thinking men in China and Japan.

Now, if I understand anything of their attitude of mind, I do not think that they want such offers. I speak advisedly of the *awakening*, not of the *new-born*, intellect of Eastern thinkers.

Lao-tsu is described as, 2,600 years ago, teaching China *to think*; and China, with some dormant intervals, has been thinking hard ever since. What thinking men in the East want now is some justification for our coming to them with a message claiming to be higher because Divine. They want the certainties of the faith—some well-defined and strongly-attested statement of God's truth. They do not want that truth tentatively restated and reconstructed. They care not for our doubts and disputations; and these restatements and reconstructions must be carefully and dispassionately, but with the sure persuasion of faith, themselves reconsidered, reconstructed, and restated, both at home and in the Far East. My paper is offered as some small contribution to this object.

The Bible, then, and the faith learned from the Book, are no more to be reconstructed and restated to meet twentieth-century ideas and prejudices than Nature herself—the great Cosmos which true science loves to explore—can be reconstructed and restated. The Bible as it is, rightly understood, and Nature and her laws as they are, rightly understood, are not (so we believe), and cannot be, antagonistic or mutually contradictory. It is the Bible imperfectly understood, and Science (for which criticism is by some supposed to be a synonym) still with a mere 'prentice hand framing opinions about matters which she has not yet fully explored—it is these alone that come into collision. But writers of the school of which I am speaking would make the Bible in many parts but the work of a tyro, a novice, a "mythical dreamer in the infancy of the race" or the infancy of the religion, and reshape, and prune, and reject this and that, leaving Science, especially in this new century, to plume herself on her achievements as if on a nearly-won omniscience.

I select, then, some of the dogmatic utterances of this school of reconstruction and restatement, and found on each a brief argument for widely different affirmations and conclusions. I have attempted to follow the order of statement in a lecture lying before me.

“Man cannot remain stationary in a state of arrested development amidst the play of forces by which he is surrounded.” This may be perfectly true of man’s intellectual power in discovery of the forces and materials stored in the world around him, and in a mechanical application of these forces; though there is strong suspicion that some of the most recent discoveries were anticipated and lost again very long ago. It is significant that the discovery and application of the art of printing, which the Chinese enjoyed four centuries before Europe, were apprehended by the Chinese 700 or 800 years yet earlier, and by them lost again or neglected till the eleventh century of our era. And it is very doubtful whether the intellect of man now is keener and stronger than in Crète, for example, 3,000 years ago, at Athens in Plato’s time, or in the Augustan age. It is quite possible for dark ages to succeed golden stretches of time, and for men to experience backward as well as forward evolution. Professor Sir William Ramsay argues that the course of religious history has not been one of continuous evolution upward, but includes a story of degenerations. The spiral nebular process of the formation of worlds may as probably (I think I am right in saying) be a sign of a vast dissolution of elements already in process, the spires being thrown *off from* their bright centres in the process of dissolution, not whirling *into* these centres—a process to be complete at the end of all things. At any rate, it is extremely doubtful whether, in the apprehension and discernment of revealed truths (those “metaphysical propositions,” as the school I am speaking of would call them), seeing that this discernment may imply the highest developments of intellect—it is doubtful, I say, whether intellect is really advancing, and not rather deteriorating. Yet some modern thinkers appear to arrogate to themselves the power to judge the intellects of long-dead thinkers, and to test and regulate those of their own time, and to forecast the progress of the next age of thought. “Eternal truth never changes, but the perception and apprehension of it does change.” It is permissible, perhaps, to ask, What is eternal truth, and

where is it to be found save in this very Book?—which, nevertheless, “the keen perception of modern thought deems partly the myth of an infant race, partly the glowing fancy of infantile disciples.” Is it rather that eternal truth *is* eternal, and shines, speaks, and thrills all through this Book of the Revelation of God, but that modern intellect is deteriorating, and truths which early scholars and early peasants did apprehend are now “unintelligible”?

Is this a grave libel on modern thought? Why cannot men to-day understand and apply truths which arrested St. Augustine’s mind and St. Paul’s, and also that of Lydia, the seller of purple, and the gaoler, and slaves in thousands, and fishermen, and Cæsar’s household, too? It is a startling thought that this self-confident century may be really sliding back, and that evidence, analogy, history, fail to open and inform its intellect, and arouse its faith and love, and arrest its adoring wonder any longer. At best it looks like “arrested development.” Are men nowadays condemned to this—

“No time to learn, no leisure to be wise!”

And all this is glossed over, and the serious prospect obscured by the dogmatic assertion that “decay and death are processes inseparable in the order of Nature from the principle of life.” I challenge the fact, unless the words be added: “the *present* order of Nature,” in which, notwithstanding the solemn truth of the Reign of Law, decay and death are accidents, exceptions, and marks of the infraction of law; in other words, of that very sin which is now so commonly minimized or explained away. “Death came by sin.”

But the application of this doubtful dictum is yet less defensible: “No advance in thought is possible without involving some change, some abandonment of earlier, less advanced thought. In ethics, as in morals, men advance as ‘on stepping stones of their dead selves.’ In religious thought no progress is possible save by the *renunciation* of some earlier beliefs once held sacred in the childhood of the race.” To all which we

answer that a series of assertions without proof cannot demonstrate. "I hold it true with one who sings," perhaps to a higher and fuller harp, "that men may rise on stepping stones" of their *living* selves, with their old faith, and old virtue, to other, but not necessarily truer, or holier things. "From glory to glory"; "add to your faith" (not first abandoning it) "virtue"; "add to your virtue" (not first letting it decay and die) "knowledge"; and so rise from life to life. Cannot earlier and less advanced thought be really the parent and source of more advanced thought without severing the connection we presume? Is it not conceivable that those earlier beliefs so sacred in the childhood of the race were true, and therefore sacred, as immediately derived from Him who walked with primal man in Eden? Never to be renounced, for they formed the prophecy, the sign, the assurance, the promise, and the type of what Christ has fulfilled and perfected for ever.

I am further impressed with the unreliable character of this system of "the reverential open mind, the reservation of belief, the deliberate suspense of judgment, the deliverance from partisanship." It makes me pause, not merely by its dogmatic assertion of negatives, but also by its tone of confidence in stating scientific guesses in terms of certainties; in this differing from the sober tone of Darwin, as a modern instance, and the great seekers after the secrets of Nature in earlier days, where no assertion but well-reasoned suggested probabilities guided their speech.

It is not surely the language of accurate science to assert that we are any nearer now to the explanation of the mystery of *force* by the definition of what are called the principles of energy and the law of thermodynamics; and no nearer to the basis and fount of life by the discovery of radium and electrons. To tabulate the ways, methods, and energies of force and of life does not bring you face to face with the origin and primal secret of force and of life. "Power and strength are with Him." "With Thee is the fountain of life." "The mystery of life," said Professor G. Darwin, only two years ago, "remains

as impenetrable as ever," save when thus (I may add) revealed and explained.

Then from this uncertain ground the theorists proceed to apply assertions of the like kind to religion. We are referred to Frazer's "Golden Bough" for an "immense and clarifying effect upon our study of the ancient religions of the world," and we are assured that the facts of this author remain, whatever we may think of his conclusions. And one thing we are told to accept as abundantly clear, namely, that in every primitive religion of mankind there is an admixture of folklore and myth, interwoven almost inextricably with glimpses of truth. From this, we are further assured, the conviction must be borne in upon the mind that not even the *purest of religions* (*i.e.*, presumably, the religion of the Old Testament as revealed and instituted by God for primitive man, and more fully given to Moses, and the religion of the New, inextricably interwoven with the Old) has "in the historic past escaped from the inevitable consequence of its human environment."

Notice the fallacies both of the premises and of the conclusions. I gather from what follows in the essay which guides the current of my thoughts that, amongst primitive religions, this school of theory would not refuse to include the three great religions of China: Confucianism, and Taoism, indigenous to the soil, and Buddhism, introduced from Ceylon and India. The significant phrase used, but with danger to the argument of the theorists, the "historic past," is applicable to each of these religions. We know a good deal from history about the foundation of the system of Confucius, about his birth, life, death, teaching, and followers. There is singularly little myth or folklore here. What few details there are as to his mysterious birth (551 B.C., probably the only approach to the mythical in our accounts of this entirely historical personage) owe their origin to a far later date.

As to Buddhism and its founder, the story versified so powerfully in the "Light of Asia" is notoriously myth, and very late myth, too. It does not appear in genuine and

authentic Buddhist literature till nearly a thousand years after Buddha's death.

As to Lao-tsu, the founder of Taoism, the same is probably true. The myths as to his mysterious *birth at the age of eighty*, and his mysterious disappearance at last from the world, are phenomena not inextricably bound up with the singularly clear guesses at truth of all three of these great religious or moral leaders. I doubt very much whether any one of the primitive religions of the world emerged through myth into truth, and whether evolution has ever produced a true religion out of a false, a pure one out of an impure original.<sup>1</sup>

But now to the point of this doubtful assertion of the complexion of other religions, as an argument for the implication that "the purest of all religions" is defiled and confused by "accretions of human origin and consequences of human environment"—phraseology which thinly hides the implication that there is abundant myth and folklore embedded in the Pentateuch, for example, and inextricably bound up with the Gospel history.

There are proofs positive that myths do abound in the story of Buddha, and in that of Mahomet; we would hope that *all* is evil myth in the stories of Vishnu. Yet such elements in those quarters were chiefly after-thoughts by non-contemporaries. But no one has the right to assert positively that Adam and Eve are mythical personages without taking upon himself the burden and responsibility of proof. For he brings God's revelation into question—the revelation of events far older than Egypt or Assyria, in documents collected and edited in early times. The same burden of proof rests on the man who denies the historicity of Abraham, of whom Christ spoke as an historical personage. What are "the pious legends woven about the Christ"? Whence came they, and who is responsible for them? Are

<sup>1</sup> Dr. H. U. Weitbrecht, in "The Gospel of Animism" (*C.M.S. Review*, May, 1909), said: "If we are to regard the history of religion as moving by evolution, that term must be stretched to include processes of degeneration. Animism in Sumatra and elsewhere does not tend to evolve a purer idea of God."

they “unnecessary of belief”? Would the Blessed Virgin, from whom St. Luke must surely have drawn his narrative of the Incarnation, and the apostles and apostolic men who narrated what they had seen and heard, or had gathered from eye-witnesses and hearers of Christ’s wonderful words and deeds—of His death, of the occupied and empty tomb, of His physical rising again, and of His going up to heaven visibly—would they, I ask, find it a consolatory, inspiring, strengthening task, with martyrdom before them and a hostile world all round, to promulgate fancy as history, and rest their faith and hope on conscious myth?

But the assault now develops itself more openly. We are told that “if all ceremonies and creeds instituted and revealed, not obscurely, in the Book so discredited were wiped out, there would remain the revelation of God to man in the soul, and the revelation of God to man in the face of Jesus Christ.” Yet the expounder of these views suspends judgment, reserves belief, is not sure even of his own selected revelation, is neither Trinitarian nor Unitarian, and is unable to say (for no book or teacher shall guide him) who Jesus Christ really is. He knows little, if anything, about God and about Christ outside the Bible, and yet that Bible he deems to be obscured and perverted by human myth and accretions. How does he know that Christ Himself is not a myth, and God but the creation of folklore? And why, I ask the second time, does he so mercilessly belittle his own intellect, and that of the socialistic writers whom he champions, as to assert that doctrines and dogmas which to the sixteenth century and to the sixth were not unintelligible or non-essential, are beyond the comprehension of the minds of this century? Am I right, then, that evolution is turning backwards, and development passing from light into darkness?

Passing from the destruction of Christian beliefs, observances, and evidences, we come to the “reconstruction and restatement” of religion, strangely enough still called the Christian religion. The first point is the assertion that man possesses a religious faculty; but here again the inveterate dislike of outside evidence

to aid this religious faculty in realizing religion is shown by the assertion that it is the peculiar property of the individual—that the conviction from within is far more cogent than the conviction from without. We are told, moreover, that Christians, Brahmins, Buddhists, Moslems, Jews, are alike impelled toward an ideal of a perfect being, a *Most High*. Does it at all affect this kind of reasoning to be reminded that the essential teaching of orthodox Buddhism is to draw the religious faculty away altogether from the Most High—from God? Atheistic (perhaps impelled by the ungodlike gods and goddesses he knew in India), and not yearning for a Most High, Buddha elevated man, but only to be lost as to conscious existence for ever in nothingness. We are also assured by a competent witness that “the world by wisdom knew not God.” So that this religious faculty demands energizing, illuminating, directing, by some force and light outside—by revelation, in fact; by what we shall be told is abnormal, and therefore incredible—the Incarnation of the Son, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost. And all the praise of “the sublime Example of human devotion, and the revelation in human form of the Divine,” is nothing worth when all the knowledge of this great Life is drawn from records “stratified,” we are told, confused also by the insertion throughout of miracles, those “unreliable myths and compilations of doubtful date and authorship”!

Yet, appealing to such records, which surely are external authority, and resting on such, the inner conviction is charitably recognized that here, perhaps (not *certainly*, however, for revelation, we are told, is moving—it cannot stand still—and all this may be superseded by other truth or myth some early day), the religious faculty may be satisfied, and the satisfaction of the soul attained.

How is it, then, that in the same breath we are told that “no intellectual proofs of Christianity are needed; none can replace the personal revelation, which is the individual’s own; analogies and evidences are largely wasted on this man; he needs no miracle-mongering to convince him”? “He will

hold to his faith in Christ in spite of all the miracles that a credulous and non-scientific age heaped up around Him"—in spite, that is, of the belief which this involves that Christ was credulous and unscientific, "affected by his environment," "emptied" of truthfulness and scientific acumen. For miracle *is* the narrative of His birth and life, and death and rising; there is no other narrative but the miraculous.

I cannot but interpose here two brief observations, partly suggestive and partly interrogatory. Much is said of the "credulous and unscientific age which saw the birth and growth of the Christian religion." A double argument is implied in this description of the early Christian days: First, that had a committee of scientists been present at the gate of Nain, outside Jericho, on the hill-slopes above the lake, at the door of Lazarus's and of Joseph's tombs, a very different complexion indeed might have been given to the abnormal events and scenes related in the Gospels as occurring at these places. To which it may be pertinent to reply that certainly before the grave of Lazarus, and certainly with grounded spears by Joseph's tomb, very keen observers and very hostile critics were present; and the one party by the blindness of hate and unbelief, the other by the glitter of large money, denied not the miracle, and admitted the empty tomb, but rejected the conclusion inevitable—that the Waker of the dead was God. Surely it required very little science to see, perceive, and test the fact that Lazarus, who stank in the grave, and by the Reign of Law was beyond hope of life, lived again in fresh vigour of vitality. Still less was science required to know that the tomb, guarded by soldiers, was empty; and where was the body; and who had carried it away? Little scientific acumen, little weighing of evidence, was needed by those five thousand men, women, and children to know that from the five loaves and two fishes, broken before their eyes and before the sunset, they did all eat and were filled. It is argued, further, that the loving fancy and fervid imagination of the early disciples framed these miraculous legends in the Gospels. To which it is sufficient to reply that such a

literary accomplishment as to invest mere creatures of fancy in the story with life and reality was *not* the feature known in the compositions of that age; that realistic novel-writing is of later date; and, moreover, that the picture of men and women in the face of mortal danger deceiving themselves, one another, and the whole Church by woven fancies of events, the belief in which and profession of which alone exposed them to peril, is an infinitely more abnormal fancy than all the miracles of miracle-mongers. If *reason* is allowed in this age any fair play, it is, I contend, without reason to doubt the historical accuracy of the sacred writers, and wholly reasonable to trust in their veracity. Once more, am I not right in thinking that a rebound from the surrender of conscience to authority in matters of faith may be a mark, if it go too far, not of the strength of private judgment and the play of reason, but of the weakness which Thomas showed, the shirking the toil and pains required to weigh evidence, and to bring reason to play, not on personal feelings and emotions, but on matters of attested or not sufficiently attested facts, and also on the doctrines and beliefs resting on these facts?

Once more let me observe the similarly inconsequent and circular method of reasoning adopted by the thinkers and philosophers whom I am endeavouring to controvert. Suppose that they could have appointed incredulous and strictly scientific men to report on our Lord's miracles, as seems implied in the words "unscientific age," nineteen centuries ago. Well, their report would be evidence—outside evidence. But who would believe it in this age, which deems evidences, analogies, and so forth wasted breath and wasted paper? The committee would not be listened to by itself. Even its report would be referred to "the individual soul's consciousness."

Note, then, but more briefly than the great question demands, that these "clearest thinkers" (of whom we are told)—these who are so certain of the Reign of Law as inexorable and unalterable, that they cannot entertain, save on wholly abnormal evidence, the narrative of abnormal events, that is, of miracles—

show again here a looseness of reasoning. The use of the word "abnormal," in the sense of being antagonistic to existing law, entirely begs the question. The Reign of Law extends, we believe, to all creation, and to regions beyond our search, but impersonal and yet active law is an "abnormal" and almost inconceivable idea. The Law-giver and Designer is outside and above all; and who can deny or doubt the possibility of the existence of a law enacting that at God's will other laws, not abnormal, not unlawful, not infractions of law, but supra- and extra-normal to those on ordinary days and of ordinary operation, shall, when the Maker so wills, take the place of those lower laws? We do not speak of the "abnormal" (so-called)—the supernatural or supranatural—as "more sacred" than the normal and natural. But such a display is more *noticeable*; it arrests attention; it produces the consciousness of the Presence of God, and it is thus a sacred and beneficent operation. We had imagined, and surely not without good ground, that the denial of the probability, possibility, and reality of miracles had died away from the lips at least of the foremost freethinkers of the age into the dictum, "it is no longer a tenable position to deny the miraculous; it is a mere question of satisfactory evidence, or the reverse."

Now, is the intellect of this last of all the ages fallen so decrepit as really to think and reason thus? Do these exponents of modern thought think that socialistic writers, or agnostic, or atheistic, or the multitudes of students and seekers after truth in non-Christian lands really yearn for this "reservation of belief, this suspense of judgment," this sitting on the fence between belief and unbelief, God or no God, a Divine Saviour or no Saviour? Is not this rather their indignant appeal to these leaders of science and thought—"Quousque tandem?" We are weary of all this scraping and plastering, this "reconstruction and restatement"; down with it, down with it, this Christian faith, and its attesting Bible, even to the ground; or else accept it wholly, loyally, and live out its precepts, and accept the strength of its salvation. You think,

we may add, for we, too, are men of the twentieth century, that your scientific research and self-satisfying faculties possess the power of a "telescope to show you the spots on the sun" of the Bible and Christian truth. But our eyes have seen these imagined spots on the sun many a time *without* the optic glass; for the keen research, sound scholarship, and eager study of both friends and foes have turned that light, that eyesight, on these records for eighteen centuries, and have failed to find real, essential flaw or fault, or "woven fancy." What they have thought they have seen of error was not on the sun's face, but in their own diseased or purblind eye. Eternal truth changes not. Is it contained in Christianity, or not? During the Christian era it is surely safe to assert that while there have been misconceptions and false interpretations of Nature, and wonderful and gradual revelations of her laws and secrets, she has not added or taken away one law or one element. Much more certain is it of Holy Scripture that since its completion, and its full acceptance in the second century, though myth, pious fraud, and misinterpretation have abounded, these have all been outside Scripture, or opposed to it. The Bible has not added one verse; only conjecturally, not positively, has it lost two or three. And we ask once more why this twentieth century, with its larger territory and wider vision, and assuming a full knowledge of physics, should shrink back as an ignorant child from a higher lesson, and refuse as unintelligible the philosophy of mind higher than that of matter? All this is a symptom of intellectual contraction, not expansion.

Is not the following a reasonable and intelligible theory—namely, that what our new teachers call the "religious faculty" made men anticipate in desire and hope, and embody in early myth and story, some idea of the Incarnation to draw us back to God, and that miracle, as attesting the Maker's nearness and immediate presence, was looked upon by that faculty not as "abnormal," but natural and wholly to be expected; and that the Incarnation, with its consummation in atonement and full salvation, is the fulfilment of all hopes? It is probable, said

Aristotle, that many improbable things will happen.<sup>1</sup> Is it not, after all, the "spiritual discernment" which we need, discernment to receive those things revealed and narrated in the Scripture of Truth, not the things only which our inner consciousness selects?



## The Decay of the Church of Rome.

By ARTHUR GALTON, M.A.

**E**XACTLY a year ago, in the *CHURCHMAN* for October, 1908, the present writer was discussing the Eucharistic Congress in London. In the course of his article he surveyed the general conditions of the Roman Catholic Church through the nineteenth century, drawing attention more particularly to that revival of ultramontaniam which followed the restoration of Pius VII. in 1814, and which was an almost inevitable reaction after the revolutionary excesses. The methods of the Holy Alliance were applied to the Churches of Europe as well as to the governments, to the elective Papacy as well as to the legitimist and hereditary dynasties. In secular administration this narrow policy failed almost as quickly as it deserved. The spirit of liberty and the growing sense of nationality were both fatal to it. Absolutism was irretrievably shattered in 1830; and, except for Prussia, it vanished from the larger States in 1848; for Russia and Turkey may be put aside, one as non-Christian, and the other as only semi-European. The evolution of the Churches, however, was precisely opposite. Absolutism, instead of declining in them, progressed, until it culminated in the definition of 1870. The principles which triumphed then have been applied with arrogant and pitiless logic during the half-century that has elapsed, and they have now produced the inevitable effects of autocracy and over-centralization. In the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by the Metropolitan of India in his "Notes on the Higher Criticism."