

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

that Christ is elevated to the position of supreme authority because of what He is and because of what He has done ; because His way of friendship and hope and love is the only way that will work. Surely it needs little arguing at this time of day that whether Christ's way would work or not, no other way works, and whatever risk it entails, it entails no such certainty of failure as the way of war, threats, violence, and intimidation.

But to recommend any such method to men we must have a definite religious faith, a definiteness of which the belief in the Ascension of Christ is the test ; the belief that God has highly exalted Him, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the

heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and dominion. Only if we believe this can we dare to put in operation the entire reversal of worldly policy that it recommends. What there is for us to do, who strive to hold both the doctrinal reality and the practical applicability of our faith, is to believe that since our Lord has been exalted to the place of power, the very evolution of history must in time reveal to all men that Christ is the only King, His way of life the only solution, and His authority the only authority that shall never be shaken, His power the only power we can dare to trust.¹

¹ W. E. Orchard, *The Safest Mind Cure*, 145.

Herrmann of Marburg.

BY THE REVEREND J. G. TASKER, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF HANDSWORTH COLLEGE, BIRMINGHAM.

IN 1879 Wilhelm Herrmann, Privatdozent in Halle, was appointed Professor of Dogmatic Theology in the University of Marburg. In 1886, at the age of forty, he published the book which has had a wide-spread and abiding influence on theologians of various schools: *The Communion of the Christian with God*, translated into English in 1895¹ from the second German edition. Herrmann remained at Marburg, notwithstanding three invitations to other Universities, and resigned his professorship soon after his seventieth birthday. In the narrower sense of the word, he did not found a school, but upon the students from many lands who heard him lecture at Marburg he made a deep and lasting impression. Since his death in 1922, generous tributes have been paid to him as 'the most distinguished of the Ritschlians,' especially emphasizing his scrupulous regard for truth, and his 'unconditional respect for reality.' These were the chief characteristics of his theology as of his piety, for in his devout personality theology and religion were not only united but also unified. Amongst those who agree in this witness are Schäfer, whose *Theocentric Theology* was written as a corrective to Herrmann's teaching, and the late Professor Troeltsch, who differed from his *Ethics* published in 1901.

¹ On the title-page of this edition, Herrmann's Christian name is wrongly given as 'Willibald.'

In a recently published pamphlet,² Lic. F. W. Schmidt, Privatdozent at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, announces the publication in the near future of a complete edition of Herrmann's works, to which he will contribute an Introduction containing, *inter alia*, an appreciation of the Marburg theologian's literary life-work. Meanwhile Schmidt has given some interesting details of the professor at whose feet he sat, and to whose teaching he confesses that he is greatly indebted. At the same time he points out what he has come to regard as defects in Herrmann's theology, and indicates directions in which his disciples are strengthening and supplementing his system of Christian doctrine.

Herrmann was a son of the manse, and in later years expressed his gratitude for the atmosphere of Lutheran piety which pervaded his home. As a student in Halle (1864-1870) his principal teachers were representatives of the 'mediating' school, namely, Julius Müller and Tholuck, in whose house Herrmann lived for two and a half years. 'It was owing to their piety rather than to their theology that the tie which bound him to these theologians proved to be permanent.' After the war with France in 1870, in which he served as a soldier, he made

² *Wilhelm Herrmann: Ein Bekenntniss zu seiner Theologie*. Von Lic. Friedrich Wilhelm Schmidt. Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr. 1922.

a thorough study of the philosophy of Kant, and gained in consequence two academic prizes. His thesis on *Gregorii Nyssemi sententiæ de salute adipiscenda* (1874) was highly commended by Ritschl; he became Privatdozent in Halle, and at the same time gave religious instruction to the upper classes in the Gymnasium. During this period Ritschl's influence steadily gained upon him; the basis of his teaching was Ritschl's *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*. In Tholuck's house he had been introduced to Ritschl, but it was the reading of the Göttingen professor's writings and not attendance at his lectures that proved the decisive factor in Herrmann's theological development. His book, *Die Metaphysik in der Theologie* (1876), began the long series of publications issued by theologians of the school of Ritschl; but it is noteworthy that his appointment to the Chair of Dogmatic Theology at Marburg followed the publication in 1879 of his book entitled *Religion in relation to Knowledge and Morality*, in which, on the theory of knowledge, he took up a position independent of his master and proved that he had critical acumen of a high order.

In *The Communion of the Christian with God* (Eng. trans. 1895, p. 69) there is a striking passage in which Herrmann places the work of the preacher of the gospel above that of the academic theologian. He coveted the gifts of the preacher, whose privilege it is 'to give to the community the best thing that can be given it.' But of himself he modestly said: 'The writer's power is insufficient for such speech concerning Jesus as should make His portrait alive and powerful in the soul of the reader.' Schmidt maintains that, in this respect, Herrmann greatly underrated his own ability. 'He had the power which a prophetic personality possesses of stating his leading ideas forcefully and from ever-changing points of view.' Above all, it was his personal faith and living experience that made an irresistible impression upon his hearers and readers. At times, too, in criticizing his opponents his

utterances did not lack the irony and the severity of the prophet.

As a lecturer, Herrmann is described as avoiding rhetoric and literary adornment; he always kept himself in the background. It seemed to his students as though he intentionally refused to make propaganda for his teaching by personal intercourse. He preferred to leave his theology to make its own impression. Yet to those who attended his lectures they were a revelation of his own heart and of his religious belief; hence they attracted students who hitherto had been accustomed to turn away from religion and theology with a shrug of the shoulders. 'I remember to this day with what reverence medical and other students spoke of the lecture on "The Reality of God" which the venerable professor, sitting at his ease and completely absorbed in his theme, delivered without a note.'

The greater part of Schmidt's work is devoted to a critical examination of Herrmann's teaching. In two chapters, entitled respectively, 'Religion in relation to Knowledge and Morality' and 'The Basis of the Christian Faith,' he briefly refers to the chief writings which have dealt with the questions raised by Herrmann, recognizing fully the need for correlating, either by extension or modification, his theology with the important results arrived at by scholars who have been engaged in the historical and comparative study of religion. Herrmann's disciples value most highly the deposit of truth which he has bequeathed to them, but in very loyalty to his memory they hold it to be their bounden duty to adapt as well as to apply his teaching to the changed aspects in which the problems he endeavoured to solve present themselves to the modern mind. It is the abiding distinction of Herrmann that he constructed 'a synthesis between Albrecht Ritschl and Schleiermacher'; he combined into a higher unity the essential truths of their respective systems, his aim always being to conserve and to utilize the treasure which systematic theology has inherited from Luther.