

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

rational explanation of the pre-human stage of evolution, especially in its pain and suffering. Here are criticisms which must be reckoned with.

When the writer comes to constructive work he is less convincing. He holds the theory of a pre-organic Fall, that is, a Fall in a spiritual realm which carried as its dire consequence the entrance of the life principle into the bonds of the flesh and the whole groaning and travailing together of creation until now.

Support for this theory is sought from the history of organic evolution, and also from certain statements of St. Paul as to the cosmical significance of Christ. In this high region the argument is naturally difficult to follow, and the writer seems to waver in his conceptions of the pre-mundane Adam. He rejects Origen's doctrine (following Plato) of a

'pre-mundane fall of single souls who carry into a penal corporeal life the effect of their pre-natal sin.' Yet he speaks of 'the unfallen being or beings whose vital units we now know in their highest expression as mankind.' Later he conceives of them as having had a corporate unity which was shattered by their Fall, and is destined to be restored in Christ.

The writer confidently believes that this presentation of the Fall will most powerfully convince the world of sin. It does indeed represent sin as a terrific cosmic force, but it is not easy to see how it can create a sense of personal guilt. We may conceivably have incurred responsibility for an Adam from whom we are descended by ordinary generation, but this pre-mundane Adam is not our kith and kin. As for the origin of evil, the insoluble mystery is still there, no matter how far back it be thrown.

The Servant of the Lord.

BY STANLEY A. COOK, LITT.D., CAMBRIDGE.

I HAVE not seen the works of Mowinckel and Gunkel to which Professor McFadyen draws attention in *THE EXPOSITORY TIMES* (p. 294), but as my own view of the Servant approximates theirs, it may contribute to the much-needed reconsideration of the problem if I outline some of the points which have influenced me.¹

Admittedly Is 40-66 belongs to a period of anticipation and reconstruction, of expectation and new birth: the period which after far-reaching disturbances led to the inauguration of Post-Exilic Judaism. Between this period and that of the rise of Christianity there is a real psychological relationship; and the present age, whose issue is so obscure to us, is akin to both. Similar experiences and similar ages supplement and interpret each other, and there is much in the Bible which the intense years in which we now live should enable us to understand, perhaps more clearly than our

¹ In one form or another they were set before the Society for Old Testament Study (July 21, 1921) and the Cambridge Theological Society (Oct. 27, 1921).

forefathers could. Of this the problem of the Servant is the most striking example.

Admittedly Deutero-Isaiah represents the high-water mark of Israel's spiritual religion. It was only passed some centuries later, when Judaism, instead of undergoing another rebirth or reconstruction, was unable to take a further step; and, instead of a new stage in the history and religion of a people, we have a new stage in man's religion and history. Whether our own period will witness a new stage in an old development, or the beginning of some entirely new development, future generations will be able to determine; but, in any event, we ourselves are well able to realize that to bring about any new decisive change in social-religious conditions more is needed than the possession of inspiring literature. In the lives of peoples, churches, and individuals, it is some tremendous spiritual experience that inaugurates a new stage, and sets in motion a fresh development; and when we seek to explain Israel's regeneration after the Exile, we are impelled to look for a spiritual revival,

a distinctive religious personality, an outstanding spiritual genius.

As we peruse Is 40-66, we become conscious that the high hopes of the opening chapters are not realized; the new age is proving somewhat of a disappointment. 'We have passed from the brighter world of noble ideals and happy anticipation to the darker region of disillusionment' (Whitehouse, *Isaiah*, ii. p. 233). That there should be subsequent reaction, retrogression, or disappointment is in harmony with the fate of many a great reforming movement—one need refer only to the times of Ikhnaton (Amenhotep iv.) of Egypt and the Judæan king Josiah. But the supreme fact is that a new stage has been inaugurated, something has intervened; and Is 53 furnishes the clue. The Servant has come and gone; he was misunderstood, unrecognized, and despised. Men had awaited some one triumphant, but just as the Day of the Lord, so Amos declared, would not be in accordance with popular ideas, so the eagerly looked-for Servant of the Lord did not answer current anticipations.

Yet, as we ponder over that chapter, we realize that a new spiritual factor has been introduced. 'His chastisement brought our welfare, and our healing came through his stripes.' We have only to turn back and read Professor McFadyen's translation of the *Penitential Confession* (p. 296) to perceive that the burden of the past has been removed, a new era lies open. How readily we of to-day can appreciate the situation! The past behind our back, the dawn of a new future; all our mistakes left behind us, and before us the new social age of our aspirations!

Accordingly, Is 53 is a psychological turning-point in the history of Israel. We have always needed a conception of the Servant that would allow us to understand the interpretation of that chapter. Certainly, different ideas of the Servant prevailed in the age of Deutero-Isaiah—even in the Servant-passages themselves; but if we may recognize behind chap. 53 a figure, the 'fore-runner of Jesus'—to quote Gunkel's title,—the persistent Messianic interpretation finds a new justification. The age that was surpassed at the birth of Christianity produced a figure that was surpassed in the Founder of Christianity. It was a remarkable age. A Babylonian monarch set himself on an equality with the Most High (Is 14). The story of Nebuchadrezzar and Ezekiel's denunciation of the king of Tyre (ch. 28) also point in the same

direction. The day of prophets and Messiahs is also a day of false prophets and pseudo-Messiahs; and when ideas of God's Immanence are at their height, it is perilously easy to ignore God's Transcendence, and exalt the human above the divine.

A new consciousness, a new daring, can be recognized at this period, and it was a period of widespread religious ferment from Greece to China. We are not to be surprised, therefore, if the age of the Servant of the Lord was one of men of tremendous personality, varying in their worth, and as differently estimated by their contemporaries as the outstanding figures of intense reforming and revolutionary energy of our own age, whom even to name would land us in endless controversy. It is enough if behind Is 53 we may perceive a religious genius, a wonderful figure in a wonderful age, and as unknown as, e.g., he who, amid wholly unknown conditions, gave birth to the lofty conception of the ethical god Varuna, who stands at the head of the entire historical development of Indian religion. That he should be unknown is no more surprising than the failure of Jewish history to name even the author (or authors) of Is 40-66, or to bridge the gulf between Zerubbabel and the Judaism of Ezra and Nehemiah. And, just as Ikhnaton's religious reform, in spite of every indication of failure, left its mark upon the old Egyptian religion, so we may believe that the very presence of Is 53 is due to men who saw in the despised Servant what others failed to see, and through him gained a new inspiration and a new vision. For a spiritual genius can be recognized only by men who possess some measure of his own spirituality.

There is an increasing readiness to recognize among ancient and even among lowly religions a spiritual and 'transcendent' element, which could be relatively as profound as that in higher religions. Sacrificial and other rites could evoke new ideas of the supernatural; outstanding 'sacred' men, and notably priestly rulers, could reshape men's conceptions of the relation between gods and men. Such men could be intermediaries: human representatives of the god, and representatives (in another sense) of their land and people, combining at once national, collective, and personal functions. There is a steady line of thought from the old sacred king to the Messiah, the Son of David, and the mysterious figure behind Is 53 occupies a logical position in the development of ancient thought.

In conclusion, the Old Testament may be said to turn upon the rebirth of Israel—upon the spirit which inaugurated the new historical development that goes down through the Persian and Greek ages to the Christian era. Isaiah 53 is therefore of fundamental importance for the religious interpretation of history and for the history of religion. It becomes ever more obvious that the vital questions of Christianity cannot be handled apart from the Old Testament, and that a reconsideration of the pro-

blem of the Servant of the Lord will contribute to contemporary Christological discussion. After all, the Bible as a whole has arisen out of the inner history of Palestine during a relatively small number of centuries, and these centuries are so organically interconnected, as regards the development of thought, that it would be contrary to all canons of research to draw an arbitrary line, as though the Old Testament and the New could be properly understood apart from each other.

Literature.

PAPINI'S LIFE OF CHRIST.

To write a new life of Christ is not too bold an enterprise in present conditions. We have had a great deal of preliminary work in the past generation, a great many books *pour servir*. We know more of the background, of the conditions of the time, of the language and everything else. And we are ready for a fresh treatment of the Supreme Story. *The Story of Christ*, by Giovanni Papini, translated by Mary P. Agnetti (Hodder & Stoughton; 10s. 6d. net), will not be accepted as the one we are looking for. Its main fault is one the present generation cannot overlook. But it is a really great book all the same, and one that no expositor of the Gospels can afford to neglect. It will be a gold mine to the preacher, for it is 'crawling' with sermons. And it will always have a place of its own, just because the writer is a man of genius and has looked at Jesus and read the Bible with his own eyes.

There is nothing ordinary about this book. Its merits (which are many) are extraordinary. Its main defect is quite extraordinary. As to its merits, probably the chief and the most valuable is the amazing imaginative power with which scenes are reconstructed. The scene in the Synagogue at Capernaum when Jesus preached there, with the members of the congregation described and the reasons for their presence; the story of the Prodigal Son (to which twelve pages are given), which reads as if it happened yesterday; the analysis of the way in which the Penitent Thief came to believe in Jesus—these are only a few out of many incidents which the reader feels to be *real*. This is how they must have happened. Of course it is imagination,

but it is imagination fed by study and based on actualities. And it makes the reading of these pages a continual pleasure. It makes you feel you are hearing the story of Jesus for the first time.

Not only so. What strikes one about this writer is that he has pierced to the heart of things, and thinks so independently that his representations are often strikingly original. His treatment of the Sinlessness of Jesus, *e.g.*, is quite his own and extraordinarily convincing. His picture of the three teachers of Jesus is very beautiful. But even more impressive is the exposition of the teaching of Jesus. There are fifty-three pages given to the Sermon on the Mount. It is not a conventional commentary, but no one will read it without feeling he has gained a fresh insight into the mind of Jesus, and more reason to love the Bible.

It would be difficult to praise these great qualities too highly. But there is a deduction. The writer is quite uncritical. His critical attitude is mediæval. Perhaps his history accounts for this. He passed from negation to a devout Romanism, and this is his standpoint in the book. The result is frequently such that one hesitates between distress and amusement. It makes his comments sometimes quaint and on occasion grotesque. A quaint example is his explanation of Jesus' baptism: 'Jesus was about to enter on a new period of His life, on His true life. By His immersion He attested His willingness to die, and at the same time the certainty of His resurrection.' That is a fair specimen of the writer's standpoint. But it is not a great defect, after all. Papini sets out to tell the greatest story in the world and he tells it greatly, in a fashion that will make it live for multitudes. We wish he