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## 895TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN THE LECTURE HALL OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, 69, GREAT PETER STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, 8TH JANUARY, 1951.

### REV. C. T. COOK IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous meeting, and of the two public meetings held on 11th October and 29th November, 1950, were read, confirmed and signed.

The following elections were announced:—Rev. Wilfrid Millington, Fellow; Rev. Llewellyn G. Tudor, C.F., Fellow; Mrs. Olga Stokes, Fellow; Rev. Frederick G. Haysmore, B.D., Fellow; Edwin Lewis, Esq., Fellow; Geoffrey M. Taggart, Esq., Fellow; Rowland E. Beckett, Esq., F.C.A., F.S.A.A., F.C.I.S., F.S.S., F.Econ.S., Fellow; Philip K. Nielsen, Esq., Fellow (on transfer from Member); John Walton, Esq., Fellow; D. Lee Chesnut, Esq., B.S., Fellow; Hugh Wilfred Sansom, Esq., M.A., Ph.D., Fellow; Rev. Herbert Collins Webber, Fellow; J. M. Vellacott, Esq., Fellow; Rev. W. C. G. Hopkins, Fellow; Michael Pittam, Esq., Member; Rev. J. J. Sidey, B.Th., Member; Rev. Colin M. Duncan, Esq., M.A., Th.L., Member; R. K. Merritt, Esq., A.B., Member; Cecil P. Martin, Esq., M.A., M.B., Sc.D., Member; Edward Bawtree, Esq., B.Sc., M.I.E.E., Member; Wm. S. Penfold, Esq., Member; Prof. Paul Woolley, Member; Rev. Alfred A. Gerlach, A.S.T.C., Th.L., Member (on transfer from Associate); James M. Houston, Esq., B.Sc., M.A., Ph.D., Member; Rev. A. J. Hutchinson, Member; John Mann, Esq., M.A., Member; C. W. Haigh, Esq., B.A., Associate; Peter J. Hart, Esq., Associate; Dudley T. Foord, Esq., Associate; Miss G. Geary, Associate (on transfer from Member); Derek C. Burke, Esq., B.Sc., Associate; William G. Clarke, Esq., Associate; Miss Ruth Olive Mist, Associate; Maurice Handford, Esq., Associate; The Lucy Stites Barret Memorial Library, Library Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon Rev. J. Stafford Wright, M.A., in the absence of the author, to read the Paper by Rev. Principal H. S. Curr, M.A., B.D., B.Litt., Ph.D., entitled "Progressive Revelation."

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### The Rev. S. Runsie Craig Memorial, 1951

In accordance with the terms of the Trust the Council have selected for the 1951 Memorial the Paper on "Progressive Revelation" read before the Institute on January 8th, 1951, by Rev. Principal H. S. Curr, M.A., B.D., B.Litt., Ph.D., as being strongly confirmatory of the Christian Faith.

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### PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

By REV. PRINCIPAL H. S. CURR, M.A., B.D., B.Litt., Ph.D.

#### SYNOPSIS.

Theologians are divided as to their interpretation of the meaning of Progressive Revelation, as illustrated in the Old Testament. The older theory is that progress consisted in a fuller understanding and appreciation of that ethical monotheism which is the very core of Judaism, and which has been its mainspring since its inception. The more modern view is that ethical monotheism represents the crown and consummation

of what has been described as the Divine discipline of Israel, in the eighth century B.C. The paper endeavours to defend the older theory, the case being based on a variety of arguments, Scriptural, theological, philosophical, and psychological. The difficulties entailed in the more conservative approach are not minimized, and an attempt has been made to do full justice to the modern critical conclusions.

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**P**ROGRESSIVE Revelation is a phrase which lends itself to very different interpretations, although it may be safely said that, up to a point, there is substantial unanimity as to its meaning provided that the two words are accepted as conveying the same ideas. Taking revelation first, the expression is generally used to designate the self-manifestation of God. As for progressive, full account may be taken of those thinkers who deny the existence of progress, maintaining that universal history is but a play without a plot. The comings and goings of men are not comparable to the ascent of a spiral staircase, but to endless and meaningless meanderings in a circular maze. Progress is thus a mental mirage. For the purposes of this paper, it should be stated that progress must be understood in the sense in which it is used by the authors of Holy Scripture, incomparably the finest and sanest intellects that have yet appeared, quite apart from their claims to supernatural illumination. Their conception of progress is that of the Son of Man in Whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, expressed with symbolic adequacy in the familiar words: "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" (Mark 4: 28).

The task of definition and demarcation is not, however, exhausted by such general observations as these. There is difference of opinion as to what the self-manifestation of God signifies. It is decidedly doubtful whether a majority of modern theologians would accept the old distinction of general and special revelation, meaning by general revelation the Divine disclosure of which Paul speaks in the opening paragraphs of his Epistle to the Romans: "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1: 20). As for special revelation, nothing more succinct or satisfying can be found than the opening chords with which the heavenly music of the Epistle to the Hebrews commences:

“ God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds ” (Hebrews 1 : 1-2). This discussion proceeds upon the assumption that general and special revelation are still relevant and reliable expressions. Its range must, however, be limited strictly to special revelation whose repository, in the last analysis, is the Word of God.

More delimitation is still necessary before the precise scope of this paper will become apparent. The special revelation contemplated is equivalent to that of Old Testament religion. According to modern critical scholarship, progressive revelation is the key to the proper understanding and appreciation of the Old Testament and its distinctive contribution to the coming of that kingdom which is an everlasting kingdom. The Old Testament is thus the written record of a progressive revelation. It is, however, needful to define that phrase with a little more crispness. Nobody who accepts the principle of revelation as Divine self-manifestation, along both general and special lines, will dispute that there are ample evidences of progress in the narrative of Hebrew religion which is contained in the Old Testament. In passing, it may be remarked that it was long said of Scotland, the Judæa of the North as Heine, the Jewish poet, described it, that its history was equivalent to the history of its religion. If this be true in that connection, it is a thousand times more true to make a similar claim for ancient, and, perhaps, modern Israel, as well. In that case, it is not unjustifiable to regard the Old Testament as the historical record of the ancient Hebrew faith.

The story covers many centuries, in contrast to the New Testament whose chronology does not seriously exceed the lifetime of the venerable Apostle John. The space between the Exodus and the Exile, the two foci of Old Testament History, might have been a thousand years, although that estimate would now be regarded as exaggerated. In any case, it is quite clear that the national piety of Israel had undergone a sweeping change for the better during these centuries. Accepting provisionally, and only for the sake of illustration, modern dating of Old Testament literature, it must be admitted at once that there is a vast difference between the Song of Deborah, which is often pronounced to be the oldest surviving fragment of ancient Hebrew writings, and those psalms which Calvin considered to be possible

relics of the Maccabean Age about a century and a half before the Christian era. These exhibit eloquent evidence of national growth in grace and in the knowledge of the God of all grace. All schools of opinion would endorse these observations. The modern doctrine of progressive revelation, however, signifies a conception of Old Testament religion which is very different.

Its supporters, who are very numerous, take the view that the primitive form of Hebrew religion was something rather different from the famous definition as ethical monotheism, signifying that there can be no plurality of divinities—gods many and lords many as Paul describes the paganism of his day—but One only, and He the God of Israel, while His service is mercy and not sacrifice. Passing over the many theories which have been advanced as to the primitive religion of Israel, which is supposed to have been almost indistinguishable from that of the heathen on the same level of civilization and culture, a beginning might be made with the stage described in Professor Max Müller's famous expression as henotheism. That signifies a type of religion in which the allegiance of its adherents is pledged to one god, but which nevertheless tolerates the possibility of other divinities guiding the destinies of other tribes and nations. If Jehovah was the sole object of worship in Israel, Chemosh enjoyed a similar distinction in the land of Moab. Such a faith might be described as a territorial monotheism. It is illustrated by such a verse as this: "And the servants of the king of Syria said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they" (1 Kings 20: 23). It need only be added that the service of such a god lay more in rites and ceremonies than in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with man's Maker. In process of time, a deeper and nobler theology took the field. Its sum and substance are stated in the words which are repeated by the devout Jew until this present hour: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6: 4-5). Henotheism is thus displaced by monotheism, and ritual righteousness by that which is moral and spiritual. That is as far as Old Testament religion goes. Of the Eternal King of Israel it may be said that He goes a little farther, thus illustrating in unsurpassable fashion Browning's couplet:

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!

And the little less, and what worlds away!

This transition from henotheism to monotheism, for which the great galaxy of prophets, who ministered in the eighth century B.C., is responsible, furnishes an excellent example of what progressive revelation signifies. Prior to the period just mentioned, the doctrine that there is but one God, and one only, was unknown in ancient Israel. It had not been revealed to men by the Holy Spirit of God.

That is a clear and convincing illustration, but it fails to convey any adequate notion of what progressive revelation in the religious history of Israel really means. It is something akin to the evolution of the human species in the natural world. Of Zacchæus and his ascent of a sycamore tree that he might get a glimpse of Jesus, it was once remarked in playful fashion by a distinguished divine, when preaching on the incident, that the little man was returning to the arboreal habits of his ancestors, in reference to the modern scientific explanation of human origins as being akin to that of the monkey. In the same way the Hebrew religion began on an incredibly low level which offered neither prospect nor promise of the faith which gave birth to the Old Testament. Thus certain significant references to the serpent in connection with Divine things (Genesis 3: 1-5, 14-15; Numbers 21: 9; 2 Kings 18: 4) are interpreted as relics of serpent worship. It must be understood that we are not concerned here with the lapses and failures of the chosen people but with the general practice in matters of religion in its rudimentary forms, such times and seasons of ignorance at which God winked. Anything approaching revelation is first associated with the work of Moses, and its contribution was of such a kind that a very considerable amount of progress was required. Various theories are advanced in connection with the part which Moses played. In some of these, it is not very easy to detect factors which would entitle the changes for which he was responsible to be regarded as savouring of a Divine Revelation. Thus it has been maintained that Moses induced the horde of nomads whose leader he was, to accept Yahweh, the storm-god of Sinai, as the object of their allegiance. That is an extreme view, but its promulgation is an evidence of the existence of a line of approach which is very different from that followed by the Old Testament scholars of a former age. It is hard to see how such a hypothesis can be reconciled to any doctrine of progressive revelation, worthy of the name. To be fair, it should be added that nothing which can fairly be so called is admitted by the adherents of this school

until the emergence of prophets like Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah in the century which preceded the Fall of Samaria in B.C. 721. That was the beginning of ethical monotheism as the national faith of the Hebrews, and the rise of progressive revelation.

Certain observations may now be interpolated that the explanation of changes so radical may be better appreciated. The first must be concerned with newer conclusions regarding the date of Old Testament literature. No composition earlier than the eighth century B.C. is admitted to be authoritative. Writings which may seem to claim a much earlier origin are declared to have reached posterity in a form which post-exilic influences have so largely affected that they cease to be trustworthy as sources of information for the more remote periods. In these circumstances, conditions, religious and otherwise, obtaining in those early times, can only be known by inferences from the existing documents, coupled with conjectures based on such principles of human history as evolution.

The wide diffusion of the latter doctrine as the key to the origin of all things has affected the approach to the religious history of the Hebrews. It is governed by the doctrine of development. Just as man is regarded as having an animal ancestry, the theology of the Old Testament took its rise in what was nothing more, and nothing less, and nothing else than Semitic paganism. In conjunction with reasoning and research, there can be no doubt about the familiar truth that things human must be estimated by their ends and not by their beginnings. The origins of Hebrew religion may be anything but promising, but its consummation earned the commendation of the Prophet of Nazareth: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matt. 5: 17). As Mozley puts it dealing with the same subject, "The test is not the commencement, but the result." The only comment which can be made finds adequate expression in the familiar saying that water cannot rise higher than its own level. The history of all pagan faiths has been one of steady decline and degeneration. Judaism followed a very different course, so that its Bible which is constituted by the Old Testament enjoys the distinction of contributing about three-quarters of the Christian Scriptures. In these circumstances, it may be argued that if we work backward in place of forward from the present place of honour enjoyed by the Old Testament, the candlestick of the

New which giveth light to all that are in the world, we shall expect that another old saying, to the effect that well begun is half done, should be verified in its case. Our Lord claims to be Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, of redemption, as well as of creation. The roots of redemption must be struck deep in human history, deeper than anything else.

A very serious difficulty however remains. Even if we are satisfied that from its very inception Old Testament piety was ever of a lofty type, so simple that the wayfaring man, though a fool, need to have no hesitation or difficulty in apprehending it, and yet so profound that it passeth knowledge, we find ourselves confronted with a multitude of facts and factors which are utterly incompatible with it. These do not refer to man's failings and failures, but to the inspired provisions of the ethical code whose observance constituted the one and only passport to Divine favour. In the keeping of God's commandments there is great reward. When, however, we turn to investigate some of these ordinances, we are sorely puzzled. Modern critical scholarship appears to have a stronger case for its views on the true nature of progressive revelation than we are accustomed to think. In short, we are confronted with a curious contradiction between belief and behaviour, as the latter is Divinely prescribed. "Thus Abraham receives from God a command to sacrifice his son Isaac; Deborah, a prophetess, pronounces Jael blessed for her treacherous murder of Sisera; the Mosaic legislation provides for slavery, polygamy, and divorce; the command to exterminate the Canaanites is represented as coming directly from God, and the Israelites are even reproved for not executing it with sufficient thoroughness; David or whoever was the writer, invokes curses on his enemies, and prays for their destruction" (Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 466). The Bible student is tempted to think that such problems disappear when the modern doctrine of progressive revelation is accepted. Erroneous because imperfect theology harmonizes well with such chequered canons of conduct.

The first point to note must be that nobody denies the fact of progressive revelation. How much of Our Lord's work lay in the correction of erroneous ideas and practices which enjoyed a remarkable degree of prestige amongst the Palestinian Jews of His day! Here is a classic example. In the Sermon on the Mount we read these words: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto



you, that ye resist not evil ; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5 : 38-39). Their point is often missed. If reference be made to the passages in the Pentateuch where such retaliation is sanctioned, it will be found that it is more judicial than vindictive. The penalty must correspond in gravity to the offence. It has, however, been stated with ample justification that the practices sanctioned by Moses, were designed to bridle the spirit of Oriental vindictiveness. No more than the equivalent may be exacted. An eye for an eye, one only and not two. Such qualifying conditions are worthy of admiration on such a low level of civilization. Nevertheless such a line of action falls far short of the glory of God. Our Lord accordingly proceeds to show to mankind a more excellent way. There surely we may say that we find progressive revelation *par excellence*, and the instance is by no means isolated.

The problem, however, does not assume its gravest form in that connection. It becomes much more acute when we learn of sanction being given to practices for which no adequate justification can be found. It is needful in that connection that the precise nature of the problem be stated afresh. The difficulty lies, as has already been asserted, in the combination of teaching on the nature of God which is unreservedly endorsed in the New Testament with precepts which it repudiates. Light hath no fellowship with darkness. Take the case of slavery. It is ever and everywhere wrong. It cannot be justified under any circumstances. Nevertheless its practice is sanctioned in the Law of Moses. It is true that the form is much more modified than that which prevailed in antiquity, but the root principle is the same.

Reverting again to the problem which may be said in some measure to dominate this paper, we find ourselves confronted with some such dilemma as this. We maintain that from the beginning revealed religion was of that exalted type which we find in the Old Testament. Even if centuries separate the contents of the Pentateuch from the incidents which it records, the fact remains that those who were responsible for its production believed that its representation of primitive life and practice in Israel's progenitors was true and worthy of all acceptance. Even if the Old Testament histories reflect the life and thought of a much later date than the circumstances with which they deal, the difficulty remains. Yoked side by side, we find supreme

theology and inferior ethics. It looks like gathering grapes of thorns or figs of thistles. The sweet singer of Israel was also a polygamist. The modern interpretation of progressive revelation seems to offer a reasonable and satisfactory solution of the problem. Religion and morality alike moved on a comparatively low level.

Various contentions may be urged in reply to these objections. Thus it is always legitimate to argue that progress is never unconscious, or accidental in the sense in which we might speak in jocular fashion of falling upstairs. Suppose that it be conceded that the human species is derived in the last analysis from the monkey family. The fact remains that the immeasurable changes which have made man what he is have been denied to all other branches of the genus to which he is regarded as belonging. Between the animal kingdom and the human race there is a great and growing gulf fixed. In the same fashion, it may be indubitable that Israel did not differ very much from the Canaanites in its earliest stages, but there must be some explanation of the incredible changes which have followed. May not that be found in the presence and power of factors as sublime and as holy as others were vile and vicious? The abolition of the slave trade in the Anglo-Saxon world was not complete until the middle of last century, but we must not draw the inference that the light did not shine in the darkness. On the contrary we discover yet another commentary on the words: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness overcame it not" (John 1: 4-5). If the light does not so shine in darkness of any kind, the latter will grow deeper and deeper, as national and personal history abundantly prove. It was because that the light of God burned and shone in ancient Israel, and in the modern world, that the darkness has been dispelled in such measure as it has been. The Pentateuch includes this injunction amongst others of a very different order: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19: 18).

Another line of reasoning might centre round the fact that the historic theory of progressive revelation is more sound from a psychological standpoint than the more modern version. Thus mental progress can be made much more rapidly than moral progress, as Paul reminds us in these words: "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law

of sin" (Rom. 7 : 25). In the same way, we may be justified in the statement that the theology of early piety in Israel was full of truth and grace within certain limits, but its morality was lamentably defective at a number of points. There is nothing impossible in the theory that such a condition of affairs was always in evidence. It is repeated in every age, if not in such arresting ways. Mind and heart do not always make one music. The difficulty, of course, remains that certain abuses, as we should now describe them, were tolerated. The explanation may well be that their proscription would make things worse in place of better. The attitude of the New Testament to the slave trade is an excellent example. Paul does not reprimand Philemon because he kept a slave. He puts the situation in an entirely new light of which his friend may never have dreamed, and by so doing he struck a mortal blow at an abuse which was destined to disfigure the earth for many centuries after he had left it. The time was not ripe. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven : a time to break down, and a time to build up (Eccles. 3 : 1-3). If these times and seasons be not observed alike by God and man, the last state will be a thousand times worse than the first. That principle, when applied to the drawbacks, besetting such an interpretation of progressive revelation as has been championed in this paper, will be found to modify them very appreciably.

Yet another consideration, based on the philosophy of religion, is too valuable to be omitted. I am indebted for it to my old teacher, Professor W. P. Paterson of Edinburgh University, to whose lectures I owe a debt which seems to accumulate with the passing years. He once observed in his characteristic way that religion ever operates with a small group of ideas. These may be invested with ever-growing meaning as they are subjected to investigation of deepening intensity, but the number is not increased. Unlike scientific progress, such advance is not extensive. The cords are not lengthened, but the stakes are made more and more secure. Dr. Paterson added that these dominating principles are usually promulgated in the beginning of a new faith, a truth which is illustrated by many of the world's great religions. It certainly applies to Christianity with indubitable force.

When we turn to Judaism, we find that this theory harmonizes well with the historic definition of progressive revelation. Its distinctive doctrines were first propounded on the threshold of its

existence. Paul finds the embryo of the great evangelical truth of justification by faith in Genesis (Romans 4). Is it then a thing incredible that the doctrine of ethical monotheism which represents the heart and soul of Judaism should be sought and found in the very inception of Old Testament religion? The objection may at once be raised that such teaching would be incomprehensible at the level of character and culture which prevailed amongst the primitive Israelites. To them such a gospel would be unintelligible. In reply, resort may be had to a variety of considerations. On the one hand, can we be so sure of the hopeless ignorance and degradation of the first sons of Abraham? The Bible itself gives a different impression. Again, it must be kept in mind that the basic truths of Christianity are continually being imparted to the heathen on all their levels, and with wonderful success, when all things are taken into account. Thirdly, attention may be drawn to the wide and rapid diffusion of Islam, whose core is ethical monotheism of a decidedly inferior type, the converts being mostly drawn from pagans whose faith is of a very rude and simple type. In these circumstances, it may not seem to be so incredible that the earliest version of Judaism did not differ in essence from the latest. It must be repeated that there is no suggestion here that the elemental loftiness of such teaching led captive the Israelites from their origins. The Old Testament tells a very different story. But it can be advanced with a good deal of confidence that Judaism would never have accomplished its perfect work unless a great ideal was set before its adherents from the very outset.

The modern account of the Old Testament faith can still render good service to those who are reluctant to accept it. It is a reminder that there is nothing static about revelation, any more than in connection with anything that God has made. He has ever more light and truth to break forth from His Word. The Author and Finisher of true faith once said, on the eve of His Passion: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come" (John 16: 12-13).

#### DISCUSSION.

The Chairman (The Rev. CHAS. T. COOK) said: I would like in your name to thank Dr. Curr for a deeply instructive paper, in which

opposing views on the subject of Progressive Revelation have been stated with conspicuous fairness, and also to couple with that our thanks to Rev. J. Stafford Wright for reading the paper.

There are various points which invite comment, but I will confine my remarks to the main issue, namely, the claim that prior to the eighth century B.C. the doctrine that there is but one God, and one only, was unknown to ancient Israel. Those who hold that view define Progressive Revelation as an evolutionary development from animism, through polytheism, to ethical monotheism. That is the idea propounded by Drs. W. O. E. Oesterley and Theodore Robinson, joint authors of the book *Hebrew Religion*, which is a textbook at a number of our colleges and universities. Jehovah (or Yahweh), we are told, was originally the tribal god of the Midianites, and Moses gained knowledge of Him from Jethro, the Kenite priest. At Sinai, Israel chose Yahweh as their tribal deity. Centuries later, Yahweh was proclaimed by the prophets of Israel as Lord of the whole earth.

It is unfortunate that students all too readily accept this theory as proved beyond question, for the fact is that it is challenged, not only by Biblical scholars of established repute but by eminent anthropologists. Fifteen or sixteen years ago the evidence was set out at some length by Dr. S. M. Zwemer, in his most useful work, *The Origin of Religion*. He quotes, for instance, Dr. Israel Cohen, an orthodox Jewish scholar, as affirming that not only Moses, but the Patriarchs, were monotheists; that the God of Sinai was not a mere mountain-god or local Kenite deity, and that there was no bridge in Israel from polytheism to monotheism. In particular, Dr. Zwemer makes extensive reference to the monumental researches of Dr. P. Wilhelm Schmidt, of Vienna University, a distinguished scholar and anthropologist, and author of many books on the origin and growth of religion.\* Dr. Schmidt's work was reviewed by *The Times Literary Supplement* at considerable length, under the title, "Evolution or Eden." Here is Dr. Schmidt's conclusion, which is supported by a mass of detailed information. He rebuts the evolutionary view of religion by asserting "that there is a sufficient number of tribes among whom the really mono-

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\* See in particular his *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, Eng. tr. by H. J. Rose (Methuen, London, 1931).

theistic character of their Supreme Being is clear even to a cursory examination. That is true of the Supreme Being of most Pygmy tribes, so far as we know them; also of the Tierra del Fuegians, the primitive Bushmen, the Kurnai, Kulin, and Yuin of South-east Australia, the peoples of the Arctic culture, except the Koryaks, and well-nigh all the primitives of North America." When lecturing at Oxford University on "High Gods in North America," Dr. Schmidt showed that "the peoples ethnologically oldest know nothing of totemism or any similar phenomena, but emphasise in their religion the creative power of the Supreme Being." And he adds: "Not evolution, but degeneration or deterioration, is found in the history of religion among primitive tribes and the higher cultures that followed after their migration."

If, therefore, the religious beliefs of the majority of primitive peoples rest on a foundation of monotheism, why should it be thought incredible that monotheism was the faith of the progenitors of the nation of Israel? Thus, as Dr. Curr has shown so ably, the older view of Progressive Revelation accords far better both with the Biblical records and with other ancient sources than the newer view, however plausibly presented.

Mr. E. J. G. TITTERINGTON said: In the title of this paper we have two terms, "progressive," and "revelation." To take the term "revelation" first—the very word denotes something which comes direct from God unmediated, which owes nothing to the human mind. The "modern" view of which Dr. Curr speaks appears to be based on an idea of a development of human thought, and the use of the word "revelation" in this connection is a misnomer.

Then, "progressive." Revelation can develop or supplement that which has already been revealed, but it can never contradict it, or render the old obsolete.

As to why revelation should be progressive, there are at least two reasons—there may be more. The first is that to which Mr. Bruce has already called attention in his written communication (see p. 16): it is adjusted to the capacity of those who receive it. We have an instance of this when our Lord was questioned regarding the Mosaic law of divorce—He said that it was permitted "because of the hardness of your hearts." The time was not ripe, as Dr. Curr has remarked on page (3).

Then again, God chooses an appropriate time for a declaration of His purposes, and gives greater light as greater light is needed. Even before the Flood Enoch was given a revelation of our Lord's coming in glory; but such details as our Lord gave in the "Little Apocalypse" would have been both irrelevant and, in the very different world in which he was living, unintelligible.

On page (3) Dr. Curr says that the national piety of Israel had undergone a sweeping change for the better during the centuries. I wonder. Can we fairly take Isaiah as representing the level of religious thought of his day? Was he not in his knowledge of God as far above those to whom his words were addressed as was Moses in his day? Are there not indications that Isaiah's contemporaries were little, if anything, in advance of those of an earlier date? When David rejoiced, as he did, in the Law of the Lord, was it not the revelation of God contained in the Mosaic writings he had in mind?

With regard to the view that Judaism passed to monotheism from henotheism (page (4)), it would seem quite possible that Jewish thought tended at times to a henotheistic conception; but if so, it was a degeneration from original monotheism. There was that revelation given to Abraham through Melchizedek of God as "the Possessor of heaven and earth"—a title which Abraham took up when he was speaking to the king of Sodom.

I think we shall all agree with the remarks in the concluding paragraph of Dr. Curr's paper, that there is nothing static about revelation—that there may yet be more light to break through from the Word of God. But it is there, in the Word; to that extent the revelation is complete; we are not to expect any further revelation before the Lord comes. Only, if fresh light is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in the Word, we should be free to follow that light.

The Rev. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT said: Principal Curr has shown how apt we are to assume that high religious ideas can only come at the end of a process of evolution. But, even apart from any theory of inspiration, it is obvious that a genius in the literary or aesthetic sphere commonly appears suddenly, and his works cannot be accounted for by laws of gradual progress. It is thus only reasonable to suppose that men like Moses and Abraham could

have been God's instruments to give lofty monotheistic teaching to the world, and the Bible indicates that they did.

Many of the moral difficulties of the O.T. can be solved by applying Paul's picture of Galatians 3 and 4. He speaks of the Jews under the Old Covenant as children in comparison with the full-grown sons of the New. A child needs to be taught by very obvious rewards and punishments. It has a right to look to its father to protect it in a way that it cannot do when it is an adult. Its powers are limited, since it does not have certain capacities that it will have later. The O.T., in looking forward to the days to come, says that the New Covenant will be marked by an inward work of God and a power that was not normally available under the Old Covenant (Jer. 31 : 31-34 ; Ezek. 36 : 25-27 ; Joel 2 : 28-32), and the N.T. confirms this (John 7 : 39). Less capacity means that certain things will be beyond one's scope. Thus the progressive revelation of God in Christ involves the outgrowing of certain applications of the moral law in the O.T. The essential principles remain, but the application may be different.

Mr. J. F. WALLACE said : Applying our Lord's test, "By their fruits ye shall know them," to the Wellhausen view of Scripture, one can say that it has helped to shake the Church's faith in the Bible. To-day many clergy scarcely know their Bibles at all, or, if they do, they do not wholly believe them, and this undermining of the authority of the Scriptures has resulted in the emptying of our churches in the last fifty years.

#### WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

Mr. F. F. BRUCE wrote : Principal Curr has put his finger on some of the most important features of the current debate about the nature of progressive revelation, and of these I reckon the point made by W. P. Paterson to be the most valuable. God's self-revelation, mediated by varying stages to the fathers through the prophets and consummated in His Son, is all of a piece throughout ; its New Testament expression differs in degree but not in kind from its Old Testament expression. Jesus claimed to fulfil, not to set aside, the law and the prophets.

What Dr. Curr describes as "newer conclusions" (p. (6)) are really those promulgated by Wellhausen and his school seventy or eighty



years ago. The more recent conclusions, represented in the writings of W. F. Albright and G. E. Wright in America and of H. H. Rowley and N. H. Snaith in England, do fuller justice to the true rôle of Moses as the first and greatest spokesman through whom God made Himself known to the Israelites in Old Testament days. Wellhausen's theory of the development of Israel's religion, based on the Hegelian interpretation of history, could flourish only at a time when little or nothing was known of the religious environment of Israel. With our present abundant knowledge of that environment, we are the better able to assess the nature and worth of the *distinctive* elements in Israel's faith, communicated through Moses and the prophets, and to appreciate the fact that it is just these distinctive elements which find their perfect expression in the New Testament. The eighth-century prophets of Israel never envisaged themselves as innovators in religion ; they recalled the nation rather to loyalty to the covenant which God had made with them in the wilderness period. They would not have thought of themselves as the bearers of a more "progressive revelation" than that given through Moses.

Throughout the Bible, man's response is the constant correlative of God's revelation, and the progress may more often be traced in the response to that revelation than in the revelation itself. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. 19 : 18) was not a commandment invented by our Lord ; it was an ancient revelation of God's will for human relations, but we can trace definite progress in the response to it, in the ever-widening area indicated by the answer to the question, "But who is my neighbour ?"

Moses may certainly be regarded as enjoining aniconic worship upon the Israelites, in the terms of the Second Commandment, of which at least the first clause belongs to his legislation. But the response to that injunction was very fitful ; for centuries after his time Israelites were prone to worship their God by means of an image which was regarded at least as the visible pedestal of the invisible Deity, if not as His visible representation. But it is unwise to argue on this basis, as has so often been done, that the prohibition of graven images cannot be so early as Moses' time.

Again, Moses may certainly be regarded as an ethical monotheist for all practical purposes. We need not be prevented from holding

this by David's protest that his expulsion from the land of Israel was tantamount to a command "Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. 26 : 19), or by Jephthah's advice to the Ammonite (or Moabite) king to be content with the territory that Chemosh had allotted him, as Israel would continue to occupy the land which Jehovah had enabled them to conquer (Judg. 11 : 24). David's protest is clearly an *argumentum ad hominem*, for in point of fact he did not serve other gods even in the land of the Philistines ; Jephthah's advice may be of the same order, as Albright maintains ; but even if Jephthah did think of Chemosh as having some sort of independent existence comparable to Jehovah's, there are other features of Jephthah's story which show that—half-Canaanite as he was—he was not an exponent of the purest form of Israelite religion. In fact, the answer to those who make Israel's earlier religion little more than a national variety of Canaanite religion is to point to the difference between Jehovah and such a nature-deity as Chemosh. The fortunes of Chemosh rose and fell with those of the Moabites ; when Moab disappeared, so did Chemosh. But from His earliest self-revelation Jehovah appears as the Living and Real God, the God of righteousness and mercy, the God whose relation to His people is no matter of racial necessity but is based upon His choice of them by His free grace. From the earliest beginnings of the record of this self-revelation we may trace its course until we see it fully manifested and underlined in Christ. It is the same God and (in essence) the same revelation. But the *response* is marked by progression and recession—and it is here that many of the problems raised by the subject find their solution. For the Bible contains the record of the response as well as of the revelation.

Mr. W. E. FILMER wrote: Dr. Curr rightly points out that the modern view of progressive revelation is largely based on the supposition that no composition earlier than the eighth century B.C. can be admitted as authoritative. This idea, again, is based on the further assumption, now proved incorrect, that writing was unknown at or before the time of Moses. But the early books of the Bible contain internal evidence that they have, at least in part, been copied from very ancient records. The statement in Joshua 6 : 25 that Rahab "dwelleth in Israel even unto this day" must either have been written in her lifetime, or it is a piece of faked evidence for the an-

tiquity of the record. The latter view is most unlikely considering its very unobtrusive character.

Again, the border of the Canaanites is described in Gen. 10 : 19 by referring to the position of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But these cities were so completely destroyed in the time of Abraham, that their exact location became lost. This description must, therefore, have been written before their destruction, otherwise it becomes nonsense.

Going even further back, the records contain some obvious inconsistencies, which even the most facile of fiction writers would have avoided. For example in Genesis 2 : 17 God is recorded as saying with regard to the forbidden fruit, "*in the day* that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." This would appear to be a most unnecessary blunder when considered in connection with the later statement that Adam lived 930 years. The solution to the difficulty is hinted at in Gen. 3 : 21, "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." This presupposes the death of certain animals for the purpose of covering the results of Adam's sin. The act strongly suggests the Christian doctrine of the substitutionary death which took place *on the same day* as the sin was committed.

Again, the story of Cain and Abel is told in such a way that God appears in a most unfavourable light in rejecting for no apparent reason Cain's sacrifice. But if we accept the theory that Adam had been instructed from the first in the doctrine that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, then he doubtless instructed his sons accordingly. If then Cain brings a sacrifice of fruit, while Abel slays the firstlings of his flock, God's action is at once explained.

Now the solution to these superficial inconsistencies is contained in the records in so unobtrusive a fashion that it strongly suggests that the records are based on fact. And the significant fact is that from the very first man has known not only the one true God, but also the way of salvation.

MR. R. S. TIMBERLAKE wrote : I would like to be allowed to comment, if I may, upon some aspects of the subject of Principal Curr's paper. Firstly, regarding slavery. I think it is important to recognise that the acceptance without denunciation of the then current

practice of slavery is not derogatory to the standards of the ethical teachers who accepted it. Cruelty connected with slavery would have been condemned, but there were good masters as well as bad. Slavery, in its widest sense, exists in many forms today, for example, the bonds of the economic system, which can cause severe mental and physical suffering. There are other enemies which attack twentieth-century man in his social environment, compared with which the lower denizens of manorial England led a protected and simple life. It is conduct, not forms, that is important.

Then, on the question of the standard of early revelation, need we argue about literary origins? The historical truth of the Bible is, in these days, firmly enough established for it to form the basis of some argument. If the Pentateuch be historically trustworthy, then the history of Israel bears eloquent testimony to the unfolding purposes and revelation of God towards the chosen people. The purity and nobility of the Decalogue is, I think, significant in this connection.

MR. L. D. FORD wrote: We are indebted to Principal Curr for his interesting paper on Progressive Revelation, and in particular for his drawing our attention to the difference between henotheism and monotheism, the former being the worship of only one god among many, the latter being the worship of the Only One God. How anybody can think that the Bible showed Israel as being henotheist I cannot imagine. The first chapter of Genesis gives the glory of creation to God, Elohim, both as regards the heavens and the earth. Chapter 2 gives the glory of the creation of man to Jehovah Elohim (Yahweh if you will), and through the first pair to all the nations of the earth in chapter 10. Surely God who made heaven and earth and everything upon it, including every man, cannot be "one among many" and surely was not regarded so in any part of the Old Testament. Exod. 15: 11, "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" is only an apparent instance of henotheism, for the "gods" referred to are not true gods but false, in other words "nonentities." They are "that which is not God" (Deut. 32: 21) and "new gods that came newly up" (v. 17), in fact "devils," not gods at all (v. 17). Another apparent instance of henotheism is in Jephthah's taunting speech to the Ammonites (Judges 11: 24), "Wilt thou not possess that which Chemosh

thy god giveth thee to possess ?” This does not mean that Jephthah believed that Chemosh could give the Ammonites anything; it is rather his way of saying : “ Jehovah is our God and has given us this land. Chemosh is your God : look to him for your land : you cannot have ours.” Even if Jephthah personally thought that Chemosh was a real God and could do things for his worshippers, this does not mean that the Bible teaches it : it would be his own opinion in which he was out of step with the religion of Israel revealed through Moses and the Patriarchs. So also Deborah’s allusion to the stars in their courses fighting against Sisera (Judges 5 : 20) does not mean more than it was Deborah’s opinion, and even then possibly merely poetic fervour rather than sober faith.

The God who, at the prayer of a man, Joshua, could cause the sun and moon to stand still (Josh. 10 : 12) was surely Lord of all Creation, and if the modern mind rejects the miracle through shallow thinking, the point is that the writer of the Scripture thought of the God of Israel in these terms, which is sufficient to show that he was *not* a henotheist, but *was* a monotheist, in keeping with the writer of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers 27 : 16 (“ the God of the spirits of all flesh ”), and Deuteronomy. In fact the united testimony of the Pentateuch is that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel, is He who made “ heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them ” including man and woman, both as regards their bodies and spirits.

Now, Israel, as taught by their lawgiver, Moses, and as receiving their religion from the Patriarchs (a thing which our Lord allows as regards circumcision, John 7 : 22) were from the beginnings of their nation, worshippers of the one only True God, all other supposed deities being “ devils ” (*shēdhim*). With regard to the nations round about, things were different. As Principal Curr has reminded us, the Syrians were willing to allow that the God of Israel (Israel’s tutelary deity as they were willing to concede) was able to operate in a limited territorial field. This was the heathen view of other heathen gods, and they ranked Jehovah whom Israel worshipped alongside their own deities (in much the same way as certain moderns do). An outstanding instance of this is Sennacherib (Isaiah 36 : 19) : “ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad ? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim ? ” Sennacherib was a “ heno-

theist," and whilst looking to Asshur to further his cause, admitted that other cities would have other (and, of course, inferior) gods. But in strong contrast with this is King Hezekiah's word (2 Kings 19 : 18) : "for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone." So Hezekiah stands fast in the faith of Israel from the beginning, whilst the heathen world around knew of gods many and lords many. The ancient heathen were henotheists ; the Jews monotheists from the beginning.

LT.-COL. L. MERSON DAVIES wrote: I appreciate Principal Curr's wish to defend the belief that monotheism has been the mainspring of Judaism from its inception, and would like to mention some of my own reasons for regarding this as unquestionable. So many issues are referred to in Principal Curr's paper, that it is impossible to discuss, or even to mention, them all in a letter. What concerns me most is the idea that monotheism was "unknown in ancient Israel" prior to the eighth century B.C., and that practically nothing in the Pentateuch can be attributed to Moses.

Our Lord's testimony was clearly opposed to this (*cf.* Matt. 19 : 8 ; Mark 12 : 26 ; Luke 16 : 29, 31 ; John 5 : 45-46 ; 7 : 19 ; etc.) ; and He surely knew what He was talking about. Are we wiser than even the Risen Christ (Luke 24 : 27) ?

I, as a palaeontologist, regard the first three chapters of Genesis as literally inspired. They reveal (as I showed in my book, *The Bible and Modern Science*) a knowledge of physics and biology far beyond that of human science until quite recent times. And there, from the first, God is represented as the Creator of the whole universe. See, too, how Abraham is said to have called God the "Judge of all the earth" (Gen. 18 : 25).

Yet these passages, concerning events long before Moses' own day, may well have been taken by him from older inspired documents ; indeed, the very wordings of some verses in Genesis indicate a date at least as old as Abraham (*e.g.*, Gen. 10 : 19).

The more specially Mosaic books (Exodus to Deuteronomy) bear every imprint of truth and contemporaneity. Take, for instance, the desert topography of the 40 years' wanderings, the truth of which has deeply impressed modern geographers ; and the details of tabernacle structure, portorage, etc., which are essentially fitted to those 40 years, and to no later period.

I also fail to see anything more anomalous in the order to exterminate the Canaanites, than there was in the previous annihilation of the whole human race, excepting the family of Noah ; or even in the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, except for Lot and his daughters. These exterminations concerned only this life ; and we are expressly told that our Lord Himself will execute far more terrible judgments in the future, than any which He effected in the past (Matt. 10 : 15 ; 11 : 24 ; etc., cf. Rev. 6 : 16-17).

As regards God's call on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, this did not seem incredible to Paul, who had seen and communed with our Risen Lord, and whose writings instruct us in our Christian Faith, yet who regarded Abraham's response as a triumph of faith (Heb. 11 : 17). And *God did not let Isaac be killed*, after all. So the call on Abraham, thus countermanded, served—without actual loss either to him or to Isaac—to show the fitness of both to be the ancestors, after the flesh, of that Divine Son Whom the Father would give—and Who would give Himself—actually to die as our sacrificial Substitute and Ransom.

Incidentally, I showed in my booklet, *The Credentials of Jesus*, that some of Moses' prophecies were still unfulfilled in our Lord's day, yet were *fulfilled to the letter* 40 years after His rejection and Crucifixion. How could any B.C. forger have produced these ?

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I have read with much pleasure and profit the comments on a great subject which my paper elicited. Special reference may be made to the contribution made by Mr. F. F. Bruce. It serves as a complement to what I have written, so that any value which my paper may possess is enhanced by such penetrating observations.

My only regret is that so very few papers give evidence of the author's grasp of the basic difficulty that the Biblical literature, to which we are indebted for detailed information regarding Moses, by whom the law came, as John reminds us in the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1 : 17), is widely regarded by modern critical scholarship as doing no more than preserving dim and distant echoes and miscellaneous relics of that early age. The books which now bear the name of Moses are regarded as the work of a generation which flourished many centuries afterwards. Mosaic material is

incorporated, but the net result is not Mosaic, but a mosaic, to repeat the familiar witticism on the subject. Even Wellhausen conceded the presence of Mosaic elements in the Pentateuch, or Hexateuch as he would have preferred to designate the opening books of the Old Testament. Conservative scholarship has always regarded these as products of the Mosaic age (to put the question of authorship vaguely but accurately, so far as that is possible over such a tract of time) and, therefore, reliable sources of information regarding the earliest forms of Hebrew religion. To the modern school these early books reflect the piety of a much later age, although defined and described in the setting and wording of a remote antiquity, while containing material which reveals the different conditions which prevailed in Israel's beginnings. A simple analogy is furnished by the names of the pagan deities which are used in designating the days of the week. Wednesday is Woden's day, Woden or Odin being the chief Teutonic deity. In the same fashion, it is argued that there are trails and tracks of debased religion in the Pentateuch. I am not sure that such theories have been renounced fully by modern O.T. scholarship. The purpose of my paper was to argue that, just as water cannot rise higher than its own level, the religion, which was the root of which Christianity is the fruit, must conform to that inexorable law of life. There is a saying of Plato that the beginning is the most important part of the work. That is illustrated by the inauguration of Christianity. This paper argues that it is equally applicable to Judaism.