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IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

III. OMNIPOTENCE AND PHILOSOPHY¹

“God either wishes to take away evils and is not able; or he is able and not willing; or he is neither willing nor able; or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and not able he is feeble, which does not belong to the nature of God. If he is able and not willing he is envious, which is equally foreign to God. If he is neither willing nor able he is both envious and feeble, and so is not God. If he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, whence are the evils? or why does he not take them away?” It is in this way that Epicurus, according to Lactantius, *De Ira Dei*, xiii, formulated the problem of evil. A similar dilemma, stated in more up-to-date fashion by a soldier in the trenches who writes from “Somewhere in Hell,” is thus set forth in a letter to an American preacher in London: “The luck is all on your side; you still believe in things. Good for you. It is topping, if one can do it. But war is such a devil’s nursery. I got knocked over, but I am up and at it again. I’m tough. They started toughening me the first day. My bayonet instructor was an ex-pug, just the man to develop one’s innate chivalry. They hung out the bunting and gave me a big send-off, when we came out here to scatter the Hun’s guts. Forgive me writing so. I know you will forgive me, but who will forgive God? Not I—not I! This war makes me hate God. I don’t know whether he is the God of battle and enjoys the show, as he

¹ Previous articles have discussed the Biblical Data and Omnipotence and Religious Experience. See this REVIEW, October, 1922, and April, 1923.

Christianity that Prof. Galloway is unwilling to give up but he does not seem to differ in principle from those who give up practically all that is distinctive of historical Christianity. Few of those who proceed on the assumption that Christian doctrines are the products rather than the producers of the Christian life have the learning and ability of our author, but no matter who it is that thus puts the cart before the horse, it is vain to suppose that he can arrive at helpful conclusions. No doubt Prof. Galloway has a way of bringing Christian doctrines into harmony with "modern thought" but his way is the way of altering or giving up those doctrines that are out of harmony with "modern thought." To say that Christian doctrines are out of harmony with "modern thought" is one thing: to say they stand in need of revision and restatement is quite another thing. What if "modern thought" itself needs to be revised and brought into harmony with Christianity?

St. Davids, Pa.

S. G. CRAIG.

EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

He Opened to Us the Scriptures. A Study of Christ's Better Way in the Use of Scripture. By BENJAMIN W. BACON, D.D., LITT.D. (Oxon.). New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923. Pp. 116. Price \$1.00.

In this little book by one of the most distinguished American Biblical scholars, the author attempts to show that (to put it bluntly) a man may reject the truth of the Bible and at the same time use the Bible essentially as Jesus and Paul used it. The failure of the attempt, despite all the learning and skill with which it is made, will seem, to anyone in whom the anti-intellectual pragmatism of the day has not destroyed all remnants of historical method in exegesis, to be complete.

It is easy of course for Professor Bacon to show that Paul did not require his converts to keep the ceremonial parts of the Mosaic law, and that Jesus Himself claimed an authority equal to that by which the Law had been given. But these facts are altogether misunderstood when they are held to mean that Jesus and Paul asserted a general right of man as man to take the Old Testament provisions with a grain of salt, or, according to our author's favorite way of speaking, to reject the "letter" and maintain the "spirit." On the contrary, Paul believed fully in the divine authority of the Law, of the "ceremonial" as well as of the "moral" requirements. But he believed that because of the epoch-making significance of the Cross of Christ a new era had begun in which some things which were required before were no longer required. The Law then, in its literal (and not merely in some sublimated "spiritual" sense) was for Paul of divine authority; the validity even of its ceremonial requirements, though temporary, was absolute. Jesus, moreover, did not, as Bacon apparently supposes, assert a general right of man as man to change the requirements of the Old Testament. What He actual-

ly did was to assert His own right as heavenly Son of Man to legislate for the Kingdom of God. The "But I say unto you" of the Sermon on the Mount, is no mere expression of the religious consciousness, which would be possible for all generations. On the contrary, it is a stupendous expression of the Messianic consciousness of our Lord, an expression which if accepted leads to an attitude toward revelation exactly opposite to the one which Professor Bacon assumes.

Professor Bacon approaches the whole question of the inspiration of the Bible in a one-sided way; he treats the Bible merely as a compendium of law. As a matter of fact, the Bible is, just as fundamentally, a record of facts. That aspect of it appears from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible from beginning to end is not merely a book of directions as to the way in which man should go; but it is an account of the redemptive work of God by which man has been saved; the "gospel," which is at the centre of all the Bible, is a piece of "good news," it is an account of things that have happened. But if the Bible is thus a record of events, the all-important question is whether the record is true. If the record is true, then God may be made in some special sense the author of it; if (as Professor Bacon, because of his rejection of the supernatural, believes) it is false, then God had better be left out of connection with it, and we had better stop speaking about "inspiration."

We are not without sympathy for those who like Professor Bacon have felt obliged by the current of the age to relinquish their belief in the truth of the Bible. We quite understand how hard they find it to abandon their sentimental attachment to the old Book. But such an effort at reconciling contradictions is, at any rate, the ruin of exegesis. Professor Bacon expresses theoretical attachment, indeed, to the grammatico-historical method, and places it in sharp contrast to the false methods of by-gone ages. But this theoretical allegiance to scientific history stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the book. In the very work where grammatico-historical exegesis is so fervently commended, it is rather surprising, for example, to find so accomplished a student of the New Testament indulging again and again in the common misuse of 2 Cor. iii. 6 ("for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life"). This anti-historical modernizing of the Pauline Epistles has in Professor Bacon something like a philosophical background. Just after expressing allegiance to the grammatico-historical method in exegesis, our author says (pp. 57f.): "Conservatives justly demand that criticism shall not be merely negative, but shall prove its worth to the multitude by making the Scriptures a greater source of spiritual life than in the past. Liberals should be well content to have it so; for after all this is the true test. . . . But in the widest review the judgment of the Christian world will decide the case with reference to its moral and religious, not its intellectual or esthetic needs." Here we have a complete rejection of that historical method which the author has commended just before. Biblical criticism is here to be tested by its moral results. It is not merely that the moral effect of the Bible is to be regarded as a fact of history which requires explanation; it is not merely that that method of inter-

pretation is to be preferred which exhibits an adequate cause for the moral achievement of Christianity; it is not merely that if the Bible is once proved to be the very Word of God no interpretation of it can be correct which makes it anything but morally uplifting. Such reasonings (though Professor Bacon would hardly endorse them all) might, when properly guarded, be legitimate. But Professor Bacon seems to be less cautious. In the effort to find Paul still edifying even when the supernatural Jesus, upon whom Paul's religion was founded, is given up, our author has really abandoned the historical method, according to which the Bible is to be interpreted as it is whether the result shows it to be in accordance with modern ideas or not. Professor Bacon has made of the Apostle Paul just such a man as he would have liked Paul to be. Very different was the real author of the Epistle to the Galatians. All the undoubted learning of Professor Bacon has not revealed to him the central fact about Paul. That central fact is that Paul had a message which he believed not merely to be useful but to be true. So long as that fact is obscured by modern pragmatism there can be no real grammatico-historical exegesis of the Epistles.

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

The Constructive Revolution of Jesus. A Study of Some of His Social Attitudes (Christian Revolution Series, No. xvi). By SAMUEL DICKEY, Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago. London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., Ruskin House, 40 Museum Street, W. C. 1; New York: George H. Doran Company. [1923]. Pp. 160.

The author of this book is convinced that Jesus was consciously revolutionary, and that the revolution which he intended had important consequences in the political and economic spheres. If He did not instigate a revolt against the Roman Empire or institute a new scheme of social and economic relationships between man and man, this restraint was not due, Professor Dickey supposes, to any blindness on His part toward the evil of the existing conditions. It was not by chance, therefore, that Jesus met His death at the command of the Roman governor; the crucifixion, on the contrary, was simply the first act in an inevitable conflict.

That conflict, according to Professor Dickey did not cease, or rather ought not to have ceased, with the accession of Constantine, but continues even in our modern world. The disciples of Jesus, it is urged (or at least implied), ought even today to enter into the sufferings of Christ by their conflict against the evil political and economic system which still prevails. They must indeed eschew the weapon of force, as Jesus did, but they must not shrink from any sacrifices. Professor Dickey closes with a quotation from Romain Rolland (*Clerambault*, 1921, pp. 285 f.), which is in part as follows:

"The crucifixion of Jesus was no accident; He had to be put to death. He would be executed today; for a great evangelist is a revolutionary,