

# The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1923

---

## IS GOD ALMIGHTY?

### III. OMNIPOTENCE AND PHILOSOPHY<sup>1</sup>

“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

---

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

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,

and the most radical of all. He is the inaccessible source from whence revolutions break through the hard ground, the eternal principle of non-submission of the spirit to Caesar, no matter who he may be—the unjust force. This explains the hatred of those servants of the State, the domesticated peoples, for the insulted Christ who looks at them in silence and also for His disciples, for us, the eternal insurrectionists, the conscientious objectors to tyranny from high or low, to that of today or tomorrow . . . for us, who go before One greater than ourselves, who comes bringing to the world the Word of salvation, the Master laid in the grave, but *qui sera en agonie jusqu'à la fin du monde*, whose suffering will endure to the world's end, the unfettered Spirit, the Lord of all."

Certainly one can have nothing but admiration for the moral earnestness which runs through the book. As compared with any placid acquiescence in the evils of the existing world—including those in the political and economic spheres—the radicalism of Professor Dickey must be given a high place in the scale of moral values. But when one starts out to criticize the whole fabric of a social system—not merely the working-out of the system in detail, but the system itself—moral earnestness is an insufficient equipment. Whether or no hell is paved with good intentions, it is certainly true that the story of high-minded but mistaken enthusiasms is a very long and very terrible chapter in human history. With the best intentions in the world, many a would-be builder of the social edifice has only succeeded in unchaining forces of evil which soon get altogether beyond control. Professor Dickey is very much in earnest when (by implication at least) he denounces patriotism as it is at present commonly understood and the pursuit of wealth, but it is natural to ask him what he proposes to put in their place.

Perhaps he might answer that this question is beyond the scope of the present book, which deals with the principles enunciated by Jesus and not with their application to present conditions. But the trouble is that as a matter of fact the author has made the application on the negative side, and it is very disquieting to be left with a mere negative. The sympathetic reader of our author's eloquent words will naturally be roused to a high pitch of indignation against existing conditions. But such indignation will be useless or worse than useless unless there is a better building to be erected in place of that which is to be destroyed.

On this positive side the meagre hints which the author lets fall are unsatisfactory to say the least. "Evidently," he says (p. 133), "in the consummated Kingdom, as Jesus saw it, there are to be no rich men—or none richer than any other—all were to be rich in the filial enjoyment of the Father's bounty, for all were to share the blessings of the common Kingdom. In seeking the Kingdom one sought the good of all. Not bread for himself nor his family, nor even bread for everybody equally, but an organization of society which should provide and apportion the needful bread to each, and a world of men and women who should be content to receive their allotted share. For Jesus' analogy of God's Fatherhood implies as the ultimate goal of society a family relationship between

men and a loving and impartial division of the Father's bounty in accordance with the individual needs of each and every child." This is a high ideal. But how is this distribution of God's bounty to be carried out? Apparently it is not to be done in any supernatural way, but through an "organization of society." The question then arises as to what organization of society will best accomplish the result. Apparently Professor Dickey is quite dissatisfied with the present organization even as a provisional approximation to the ideal. But the only substitute which has been proposed for the present system of distribution is some sort of distribution by the state. The question, therefore, cannot be avoided whether such distribution by the state would be better than the present system. In the opinion of many men just as unselfish and high-minded as Professor Dickey, it would be not better but infinitely worse. State paternalism—men being what they are—would probably mean despotic control by an even smaller and more unscrupulous company than those who now, through a capitalistic system, influence the destinies of their fellows. Certainly state paternalism would mean the very opposite of that happy human family which is so finely pictured by Professor Dickey. Collectivism is the very opposite of the relation of children to a father; on the contrary, even in its partial manifestations today it is a soul-killing and degrading thing.

The real trouble is that evil men will bring evil results out of any organization into which society may be formed. Our author does not fail to detect the fact, and he believes that Jesus dealt with it. Jesus, he maintains, provided a way of changing evil men into good men. But the way which he attributes to Jesus is entirely different from that which the real Jesus taught. Professor Dickey appeals to the biologists in support of the view that there is nothing constant about human nature—the appeal, by the way, is a very questionable one, since biologists discover animal species that have reached the limits of their evolution, and there is no assurance in biology that the human race might not prove to be in that sad condition—and Jesus is thought to have provided for a change by associating Himself with His followers in a fellowship of vicarious suffering. Of course all this will bring absolutely no comfort to anyone who is really facing the guilt and power of sin. And it is quite false to our records of Jesus' life. The opposition of Professor Dickey to the real doctrine of the vicarious suffering of the Lord, his mere association of Jesus with His followers as part of the suffering remnant spoken of in *Is. liii*, and his reduction of the gospel teaching about the Cross until it becomes little save an illustration of a general biological principle—these things place a profound gulf between our author and the real Jesus of Nazareth. The author recognizes the need of a change in the individual man, if any social system is to be satisfactory; but his conception of the way in which that change is to be wrought is almost the exact opposite of the Christian conception.

The real trouble with Professor Dickey is not that he is too radical, but that he is not half radical enough. The real revolution which Jesus came into the world to produce was far more thorough than that which

our author advocates; for it involved not merely a new use of old materials but a new birth. Certainly regenerated men should never placidly acquiesce in evil economic conditions, even in this present evil world, and they should use every legitimate means to improve those conditions. But the really essential weapon in their warfare is the gospel of the Cross of Christ from which Professor Dickey, with the whole of modern naturalistic liberalism, has apparently turned away.

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

*The Acts of the Apostles.* In the Revised Version. With Introduction and Commentary. By A. W. F. BLUNT, B.D., Vicar of St. Werburgh's, Derby; Hon. Canon of Southwell; Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Southwell; formerly Fellow and Classical Lecturer of Exeter College, Oxford. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press. Printed in England 1922. [New York: Oxford University Press, American Branch.] Pp. 272. Price, \$1.50.

In this volume in *The Clarendon Bible*, of which the general editors are the Bishops of Newcastle and Ripon, the author accepts the Lucan authorship of the Book of Acts and then proceeds to reject the things that would give that conservative critical conclusion real value. In combining acceptance of Lucan authorship with rejection of the supernatural content of the book, Mr. Blunt allies himself with Harnack and others, but the position is an altogether untenable one. Our author, in his extreme dislike of definite assertions, will not indeed say that he rejects all the miracles in the Lucan narrative; and at one place he even pronounces it "not unreasonable to suppose that the occurrence of such a miracle [as the moral miracle of Jesus' sinlessness] would be accompanied by the occurrence of miracles in the physical sphere as well" (pp. 35 f). But practically very little is made of this possibility. The miracles, where the historical basis of the accounts is accepted, are rationalized away in the manner which has been strangely revived (despite the deathblow which Strauss had been supposed to have dealt to the rationalizing method) by Harnack and C. C. Torrey. Certainly Mr. Blunt does not face with any seriousness the question how a companion of Paul, who came into direct contact with the Jerusalem Church, could have been so egregiously mistaken about the way in which that Church came into being. At times one is led to hope that Mr. Blunt may be inclined to solve this problem in the way of an acceptance of the supernaturalism of Acts at least so far as the origin of the Church is concerned; he does find it "difficult to believe" that the change in the disciples between Good Friday and Pentecost "could have resulted from anything less than a concrete fact producing the new conviction" (p. 132). But the implications of this somewhat cryptic affirmation become nowhere apparent.

The question of miracle can be treated in this cavalier manner because Mr. Blunt believes it to be unimportant for Christian faith; what is really important, he thinks, is "the moral wonder of Christ's Personality" (p. 37). But here our author parts company with the whole of apostolic Christianity; for the thing that was important for apostolic Christianity