

# THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW.

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## I.

### JAMES McCOSH AS THINKER AND EDUCATOR.\*

#### I.—AS BELFAST PROFESSOR.

A SCOT, born in Ayrshire, on the banks of the "Bonnie Doon." of sturdy and God-fearing ancestry, who had played the man more than once in the struggle of the Covenanters against oppression—a scion of the great middle class of Scotland, made up so largely of cultivators of the land, who through the exercise of the proverbial thrift and intelligence of the "canny Scot" had forced an unwilling soil into fertility and had achieved easy circumstances—James McCosh inherited all the virtues of his class and ancestry. These formed the basis of his character, and held the secret of his unvarying success in the larger spheres in which he was destined to become an actor. Born of highly intelligent and conscientious parents, who possessed in full measure that tough moral fibre and that firm adherence to high ideals of religion and duty so characteristic of the Scotch, the parental traits entered as so much clean grit into the constitution of the boy and gave a pledge of the force he was to become in later years in his own and other lands. Young McCosh was fortunate in his home-life and training, thanks to a

\* The sources from which the materials used in the following article have been obtained are (1) *The Autobiography of James McCosh*, so ably and gracefully edited by William M. Sloane; (2) the works of McCosh, including books, pamphlets and addresses, a complete bibliography of which has been made out by Joseph H. Dulles, Librarian of the Princeton Theological Seminary, (3) and most important of all, a personal acquaintance ranging over twenty years, in which, as pupil and later as teacher in the department of Philosophy at Princeton, the writer had abundant opportunity to study McCosh's many-sided life.

## V.

### REVELATION OR DISCOVERY.

**T**HE question, Is the Christian religion the result of revelation or discovery? is pushed to the front by the steady gain of the theory of evolution within the last quarter of a century. Into the merits of evolution as a working hypothesis, either from the point of view of general science and philosophy or from that of theology, it is not the purpose of the present paper to enter. That in some of its forms it is workable and that it gives an account quite reasonable and satisfactory of some aspects of Christianity, even its bitterest enemies concede, and its advocates triumphantly claim as a demonstration of its truth. There should be nothing to take offense at in the search for, and the discovery through historical methods, of the origins and unfoldings of the Christian religion. Christianity is nothing if it be not a historical religion, that is, a religion which challenges investigation as to its appearance and progress in the world. It is willing to submit its credentials to any fair court of scientific research. It fears no harm for itself from a trial before the tribunal of history.

But the most manifest fact of the growth of the Christian religion is its gradualness. The Gospel does not claim to have come from the skies like the fabled image of Diana at Ephesus, all carved and finished to its finest lineaments. It begins with small, simple and crude elements, and grows through additions, eliminations and alterations, very much like an organic being, until it has reached a definite ideal stature of fullness and completeness. From the point of view of science, this process of growth may be called its evolution as a religion; from the point of view of its divine origin, it is the cumulative delivery of its content. In any case, the method of its formation is gradual and progressive.

Investigations and presentations which centre about this feature of it offer no stumbling block to the stalwart Christian thinker. He anticipates no harm from them. On the contrary, every certain result of natural science and philosophy will only set out more clearly the beauty and charm of his faith and commend its uniqueness and nobility. The question of most importance is

not, how does Christianity grow, but to what does it owe its origin? What is its efficient cause? Has it been reached up to by man, or has it been handed down by God? Is it a discovery or is it a revelation? This is the real question of the supernatural. Too often in the past the questions of the supernatural and the preternatural have been confused with one another. Because there is a resemblance between the formation of Christianity and other historical developments, it is quite easy to conclude that, like all other things, it is a natural production from below, a discovery of the human mind. Because, further, so much of the preternatural element in the mode of its emergence in the world, and of its course in history turns out to be on closer examination analogous to all else in the course of nature and may, therefore, from one point of view, very properly be called natural, it is easy to pass on to the inconsequential position that its cause also is one of the forces of nature in its broad conception, namely, the human mind and the human experience. The preternatural is an element of secondary importance to the life of Christianity, and may be left for purely historical processes to sift, to vindicate and in part to expunge. But the supernatural can never be thus relegated to an unimportant place or considered a matter of indifference to the Christian thinker. On the contrary, it has always been and must always remain a pivotal point, and a distinctive feature of the Christian religion. Whether the system he accepts as of divine origin and authority was given by revelation or discovered by human effort, cannot be other than vital to the believer. For if given it implies a giver and a motive, a purpose and end for the gift. But if simply found, it leaves these and many other matters in a cloud of uncertainty and practical uselessness.

The answer to the question, Is Christianity the result of a revelation or a discovery? may need to be carefully reasoned out. With this reasoning we do not purpose to concern ourselves in the present article. Our contention is that for the believer in Christianity that answer can only be the familiar one: Our religion is directly the gift of God to us. Apart from his initiative we could not have conceived of it, framed it, or guessed its existence.

In explanation of this position let it be remarked that it is the platform occupied by the men through whom Christianity came into the world. The Biblical claim from the beginning includes the idea of revelation. It is always God that seeks man and strives to make Himself known to him. Man has but to open himself and receive God's revelation. Such a claim, it would not be

unsafe to say, is not made outside of the realm of Biblical religion except by derivative and counterfeit systems like Islam and Mormonism. In all purely pagan religion, man is seeking after the highest good, whether he calls the object of his search by the name of God, or by any other. God stands aloof, and must be sought after and placated by prayers, by propitiatory sacrifices and self-denials. Man is never looked upon as needing to be reconciled to God, but always God as needing to be reconciled to man. Christianity alone regards God as providing for man a mode of propitiation, and beseeches man to be reconciled to God.

God does indeed require to be propitiated for the sin of man. But it is He who provides the way of propitiation. We need not deny or minimize the insistence of the Bible on the supremacy of moral law and the necessity of expiating every violation of it in order to call attention to the feature just noted. But is it an insignificant fact that the apostle who makes the most of the judicial figure in his presentation of the Gospel never uses the expression "A reconciled God," that he never mentions explicitly the reconciliation of God to man, but constantly urges men to be reconciled to God? Are we wrong, then, in drawing the line between the Biblical and the extra-Biblical religions just here? The former plants itself squarely upon the principle of revelation, and is willing to stand or fall with it. The latter are content to rest on the principle of discovery.

But, it may be asked, are these two platforms contradictory? Are they mutually exclusive? Is it not possible that revelation and discovery may combine? Indeed, must they not? Certainly, if revelation is the impartation of knowledge, the reception of that knowledge as a new thing must be, in a sense at least, a discovery. There is no revelation which does not in this sense involve a corresponding discovery, just as there is no discovery which is not at the same time a revelation. But the use of terms in these propositions is rather rhetorical than exact. Discovery in the true sense is knowledge attained in consequence of the initiative and positive effort of the discoverer. Revelation in its turn is the impartation of knowledge as a consequence of effort on the part of the revealer. A true synthesis of these two could only be accomplished by an accidental simultaneity of initiative and effort on the part of God the revealer and man the discoverer. In other words, we should have to conceive of God and man as starting at the same moment of time, but independently, the one to make Himself known and the other to know. But this, which is an

abstractly conceivable coincidence, is philosophically inadmissible and from the historical point of view cannot account for the facts of man's religious life upon earth. And the question must recur, Who first takes the first step, God or man? To say that the two are one is to use words without meaning.

If we set aside this effort at a synthesis between the pagan and the Christian views, the question remains as above in a sharp alternative, "Discovery or Revelation?" Is Christianity in the right when it conceives the idea of revelation as a necessary part of itself, or may it look on itself as the result of human achievement, the fruit of pure investigation? We shall study the question with better results if we institute a comparison between Christianity and the greatest and most successful of the pagan religions whose fundamental principle is the opposite of that of Christianity—Buddhism.

Christianity and Buddhism may be said to divide the vast mass of the human race between them. The first claims some 475,000,000 of adherents and the second is reputed to have 400,000,000. In many points these two great religions are quite similar. Each of them is centred about a great personality, each presents an ideal and embodies its teaching in an example, each furnishes an object for personal attachment and sets the power of personal love and loyalty at work in the heart of believers. As far as applies to Buddhism, this characteristic explains the power and hold of that religion over men, and at the same time shows how indispensable the element of personality is in religion. But to return from this thought, which is somewhat of a digression, to the parallel between the two great religions, both Christianity and Buddhism inculcate through the lives and labors of their founders the beauty of the law of self-sacrifice. Buddha is represented as freely enduring the severest afflictions, and voluntarily renouncing final beatitude for ages in order to work out the salvation of others. How much like the self-sacrifice of Christ his self-renunciation is may be realized from the effective use of it made by Francis Xavier in his missionary efforts. As soon as he portrayed Christ as a greater Buddha, that is to say, a mild, loving and self-sacrificing teacher and leader into blessedness, he found Buddhists accepting his message in large numbers. But, further, and finally, both Christianity and Buddhism address themselves to all men. Race, caste and all other distinctions are disregarded by both. The low-caste Sudra as well as the proudest Brahmin, the Jew and the Gentile, the barbarian, the bond and the free, are all entitled according to both to receive the glad tidings.

But here the resemblances end and the differences begin. The most fundamental and radical difference is that summed up in the words "revelation" and "discovery." Christ comes from above to make known the love of God, and to remove all obstacles to the fellowship of the Father with His children. Buddha, rising out of humanity, through patient labor, through pain and suffering, through meditation and self-sacrifice, seeks for himself and others the way of escape from misery and death.

The story of Buddha's search for the light is a familiar one, and has often been told. But so pertinent is it as an illustration of the difference between the Biblical and the pagan ideas of religion that its main outline must in this connection be traced again. The prince Siddhartha had everything in his paternal home to create contentment in the heart of a human being. But he was not happy. From early youth the fact of human misery profoundly impressed him. It moved him to look upon human life as a vain show whose pleasures could make no adequate atonement for its ills and pains. He desired to become a hermit, to cast off from himself the state and dignity of the palace, to put on the yellow garments of a mendicant, beg his bread, wandering up and down the world, and thus find peace from the soul-devouring thoughts that possessed him. His parents were grieved by the manifestation of these gloomy tendencies. They thought to distract his attention, cure his melancholy, and fix him to his home and station by giving him the charming Yasodaya for a wife. For ten years the plan proved a success. He lived in relative happiness. But just as this happiness seemed to be enlarged and intensified by the birth of a son, thoughts of the misery of the world returned to him with greater force. Walking in his garden, he meditated on old age, sickness and death; and the desire to solve the problem of suffering revived within him. But to do this, he must leave his home. The new-born son, instead of holding him, only precipitated his resolution to escape out of the world. "See," said he, "here is another tie, alas, a new and stronger tie, that I must break." And so in the dead of night, to avoid the pangs of farewell, and the difficulties that would surely be put in his way, he took his leave. To show the depth of his convictions, the story weaves at this point a thread of pathos into the transaction. Before he departed, he looked cautiously into the apartment in which his beautiful wife and his infant son were peacefully asleep. One of her hands was lying on the face of the babe. A longing came over the prince to see the child. But, to see him,

he said, "I must remove the hand of his mother, and she may awake, and if she awakes, how shall I depart? I will go, then, without seeing my son. Later on, when all these passions are faded from my heart, when I am sure of myself, perhaps I shall be able to see him. But now I must go." And so he went.

But the struggle was not ended with such a simple act as flight from home. Every step he took brought him a new temptation to retrace his course. He thought of his father and mother, of his wife and child. "Return," said the Devil to him. "What seek you here? return, be a good son, a good husband, a good father. Remember all that you are leaving to pursue vain thoughts. You are a great man; you might be a great king as your father wishes, a mighty conqueror of nations. The night is very dark, and the world before you is empty." But he resisted. He passed out of the realm where his father held sway. He took on himself a hermit's garb. He begged his food from door to door in a wooden bowl, and adopted all the loathsome modes of life of the mendicant, hoping that through holiness he might attain the truth. All in vain. After some time spent in this way he was persuaded that the quest would not be successful. Instead of rising to a higher plane, he was being lowered by these practices to the level of the beasts. He could not raise his mind to meditation and thought when his body was crying for the satisfaction of its necessities. He realized that self-denial of this sort was just as much submission to the flesh as self-indulgence. He reached the conclusion that if human misery was not to be put out of sight by living in a palace, neither was it to be overcome by coming into close touch with it and adopting its garb. If the allopathic method would not cure the disease, the homœopathic was just as impotent. Wisdom was not to be found either with the hermit in the cave or with the king in the palace.

And yet he was convinced that truth was a reality, and that the search for it must not be given up. His next thought was of nature. Perhaps by communion with the great forces of the inanimate universe he would find what communion with man had not given him. For six years he lived in the woods, with the streams that came down from the snowy summits, and the tall forest trees that had outlived twenty generations of men, and the rocks that had silently witnessed the coming and going of even these long-lived trees. What he did in his search we are not told, but the result was again a failure. Communion with nature brought him no nearer his goal than life among men both high and low.

And he acknowledged his defeat by leaving nature and going back into the town.

Still he did not despair. There was one more trial to be made. He could look into himself. For forty-nine days, we are told, he sat under a Bo-tree thinking, thinking, thinking, and looking within himself. And within himself he finally saw the light.

We have given these details of the story of this search in order to show how slow, painful and difficult to reach is the truth of life according to the standpoint which makes the attainment of it a discovery. It has been hidden away where it escapes all ordinary search. What avails it that it proves to be within one's own self, so long as it is so carefully disguised and so deeply buried that only one man in the history of the world succeeds in discovering it, and he after such patient and painful experience?

The unsatisfactoriness of this uniqueness of the Buddha led, it is true, at a later stage in the history to the elaboration of the doctrine of many Buddhas. But this idea is extraneous to the system and can only be held as a part of that mythological luxuriance which has grown about Buddhism in the popular mind.

Contrast with this the standpoint of Revelation. From the day of the creation of man he is made to live in communion with the source of all life. If he has ceased seeing it, it is because he has blinded himself by his sin. And even in his blindness, he is not allowed to continue without effort on the part of his Creator to break the darkness that man has made for himself and flood him with light. God not only speaks to him in the many voices of nature, but he speaks to him personally, directly and clearly. He speaks as a father to his child, at first in simple and elementary forms, in signs and pictures and actions, later through articulate words. At sundry times and in divers manners He spake to the fathers through the prophets, modulating his revelation to the capacity of the man to receive it. And when the fullness of the times was come, "He spake" in the clearest and fullest forms "through His Son." The Incarnation is not merely in order to revelation, but from the nature of the case it could not but be as complete a revelation of God as man could receive. But both incarnation and revelation are in order to the reconciliation of man to God.

Thus we are led to a second question. What does man find according to the standpoint of discovery, and what is revealed to him according to the standpoint of revelation? Does he find what his heart craves in either or in both? Does he attain to the knowledge of God and to eternal peace and blessedness? Buddhism,



in which the standpoint of discovery is maintained on this point also more clearly and consistently than anywhere else, may serve to answer the question. Buddhism disclaims attaining to the knowledge of God. It is a question whether it involves any idea of God. It has often been represented as a system of pessimism. Most of its expositors do not hesitate to say that it is essentially atheistic. Those who have watched it in its practical workings among its adherents and have observed the existence of a mode of worship in it, who have seen the instinctive appeals and prayers of Buddhists under the stress of need to a Supreme Being, do not hesitate, on the contrary, to call it theistic. But these practical manifestations of a belief in God are no more a part of Buddhism as a religion than the superstitions of Christians are a part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In reality, Buddhism has nothing to do with God. As a philosophy, it leaves room for an unknown primal cause of all things; as a religion of life, it is not concerned with the question of the existence or non-existence of the being known in other religions as God. It is neither atheistic nor theistic. It is agnostic. It leaves one free to be a deist, that is, to believe in a God who is the ultimate and perhaps personal cause and ground of all things, but who will not, and possibly cannot enter into relations with human beings or be reached by them.

What, then, was that which Buddha discovered? Buddhists call it The Way of Peace. The great light which he saw under the Bo-tree opened the secret of the universe to him. He realized that there was a law at the heart of the world. As far as this law affects human life, it may be expressed in the inevitable connection of life and misery. To be rid of misery one must be rid of life. But he must not to be rid of life by dying; for that were simply to change from one condition of misery to another. Life and death are not antagonistic; they are complementary. Nor is the cessation of life annihilation; that is unthinkable. Life and existence are not synonymous. The great peace which must be attained is not death and it is not annihilation, but mere lapse into pure existence without life and without death. Because the prince Siddartha saw this, he was called the Buddha, the Illumined.

But how shall one lapse into this Nirvana? Not by suicide, for that would be worse than avoiding the devil in order to fall into the deep sea. Suicide would plunge the perpetrator into severer misery because it is essentially wrong. The way to escape misery is not so short and easy. On the contrary, it is very long and arduous. One must do good deeds and think good thoughts.

He must follow the Eight-fold Path. He must be honorable and just; he must be kind and compassionate; he must love truth and hate iniquity. The moment one begins to do these things, he is on the way to Nirvana. It may take long, but if he persists he will surely arrive there. The whole way he will not see from the beginning, but every step will lead him to another, and he will know the next as he advances.

This is the Law. It is a law in the strictest sense of the word. No infractions of it are to be thought of. Modern naturalism is supposed to be the originator of the idea of unalterable sequence of cause and effect. As far as such sequence is postulated in the physical world, it may be true that modern natural science has most strenuously insisted on it. But in the moral sphere Buddhism anticipates modern science by two millenniums and a half. It used the inexorable law as an explanation of many dark facts of the present as well as a ground for foreshadowing some features of the future.

For everything that happens to a man in this life the law furnishes an explanation by pointing some deed in a past state of existence. A Brahmin is about to kill a goat for a feast. The intended victim itself had once been a Brahmin and for killing a goat for a feast had been doomed to have his head cut off in five hundred births. It warns the Brahmin that a similar fate awaits him if he should commit the same sin.\* Kunala, a son of the famous king Asoka, had beautiful eyes which awakened sinful desire in a woman, who, like his mother, was one of Asoka's wives. Being repulsed she conceives and without delay carries out the cruel design of putting out his beautiful eyes. The Buddhist's conception of the Law compels him to seek for the explanation of such an experience. And he finds it in a story about Kunala. Once upon a time, in a previous life, the prince had been a huntsman. Coming upon a herd of five hundred gazelles in a cavern he had put their eyes out. For that deed of cruelty he had suffered for many hundred thousand years in hell and in addition had his eyes put out five hundred times in as many human births.†

But the Law is used also as a ground of forecasting the future and as a motive to uprightness in the present. This is done in the familiar doctrine of Karma. Karma is the passage of character attained in one state of existence to future states. There are experts in the sphere of Buddhistic lore and philosophy who claim

\* Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stories*, No. 18.

† Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Buddhism Indien*, pp. 360-370.

that Karma is something different from the transmigration of souls; that the transmigration of a personal identity is not a part of the teaching of Gotama Buddha. Whether this be so or not, it is certain that Karma represents the inexorableness of the law that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," at least in the sphere of ethical realities. That law is relentless, no violations of it are conceivable. God is no factor in the process. Miracle is impossible. As God had nothing to do with the origination of life and misery, he has nothing to do with their abolition. If He exist at all, He stands outside the sphere of life and has no connection with it, nor desire and power to interfere in its course. The Buddha is honored and loved because he discovered for himself and made known to others this great law. He saves no one. Every man must save himself by his conduct. He must change his Karma.

Contrast the idea of Revelation with that of Discovery on this point. Revelation brings to man in his misery the knowledge of an infinitely loving Person. It does not minimize the idea of law. Indeed, in its exaltation of law, it shows how the misery of mankind originates in its disregard and violation, that is, sin. But if law is exalted, it is because it is the thought of a loving Father for the administration of His household. Neither is misery a necessary element of life. Life is a positive good. It is because men have not enough of it that evil comes. Christ comes to give "more abundance."

Superficial thought at this point might raise the query, Is Buddhism the inevitable path that must be trod by the standpoint of discovery? May not discovery lead to the Heavenly Father instead of the inexorable Law? But closer scrutiny will show that if God be the Heavenly Father, He could not leave the fact to be casually discovered by His children. He could not allow them to grope in the dark seeking Him if haply they might feel after Him. He is pleased to be sought after, but He must Himself take steps to make Himself known. If religion be a discovery, the object of it can never be higher than the Buddhist's Way of Peace, or the inexorable law of righteousness.

Moreover, if the standpoint of discovery cannot be harmonized with the idea of religion as a personal relationship, worship and prayer cannot be true elements of religion. And with the loss of these, the social element goes also. Religion is reduced to the simple pursuit by the individual of the right path, which if it lead not to the Buddhist's Nirvana, leads no one knows whither.

Once more, the two standpoints differ irreconcilably in their answer to the question, How is the truth apprehended by man? To the standpoint of discovery, religion is a matter of the mind pure and simple. It is the quest and attainment, through the intellect, of knowledge. Its place is among the sciences. Just as Sir Isaac Newton through thought reached the law of gravitation, so Buddha, or whoever may be the discoverer of the Way of Peace or of the Summum Bonum, through meditation reached the ultimate reality of religion. The heart has nothing essential to do in the case. It may make its complaint to the intellect and stir it up to undertake the search. It may receive the news of the discovery with joy or with indifference, but as far as the discovery is concerned, it is outside of its sphere.

Revelation, on the other hand, calls not for a mere intellectual apprehension of a fact or for a law, but for the response of the whole man to a personal approach. Religion is a matter of faith, and faith is the movement of the whole rational nature, intellect, sensibility and will toward God; the simultaneous recognition of and surrender to the Divine.

It is not our purpose to pursue the contrast to its end, or to construct an argument in behalf of the standpoint of Revelation. What has been said will sufficiently illustrate the difference between the two standpoints. When this difference is realized the question must naturally arise, Can Christianity abandon its standpoint without committing suicide? Can it pass from supernaturalism to naturalism without losing its character as a life-principle which grows out of the self-imparted knowledge of God and right relationship with Him, and which issues in a perfect and eternal blessedness in His presence? Whatever else we may or may not insist on as of the essence of the Gospel, whatever else we may regard or refuse to regard as a part of the citadel, this, certainly, is the very heart of it. Biblical religion must stand or fall with the claim that it is a revelation of God's love to man, to the end that man may be brought into communion with Him.

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