

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

NOVEMBER, 1901.

ART. I.—CONSCIENCE AND THE REVELATION OF
THE GOSPEL.

THEORIES of conscience are outside the aim of this paper. More than outside it are attempts to deduce the objective truths of the Christian Revelation from a subjective examination of the moral nature of man.

I. Yet the first point to be insisted on is this: that there is in man's conscience—as apart from Revelation—that which can never be adequately explained except on the hypothesis of a Supreme Moral Governor—that is, of a Personal Divine Being with rightful authority over man.

Test utilitarian philosophy by a few crucial questions. Will any man pronounce *him* to be an honest man who proclaims that he is only not a dishonest man because he believes that honesty is the best policy?

Will the moral sense of men endure to be told that the wrong-doing of the murderer consists in his miscalculating what will make most for his own advantage? There are many circumstances in which it is well said that “if right and wrong be thought to depend on utility or non-utility, right and wrong are at an end.”¹

And if man's intuitive sense of *wrong* refuses to be reduced to anything like a disregard for selfish utility, will a relationship to something higher than this explain the phenomena of conscience as pertaining to the sense of right and wrong? Relation to that which is suitable or beautiful will not. That which is lovely in virtue, and that which is hateful in vice, is so, because of its relation to something else than the grand or the noble or the sublime. *Then* it is that the nobility of what is right is most clearly seen, when it demands the surrender

¹ See Jackson's “Bampton Lectures,” p. 71.

of all that is lovely and all that is loved, all that the heart delights in, when it bows down to suffer, as in obedience to the *dictum* of a heathen moralist: "Summum crede nefas animam præferre pudori."

Relation to human law will not. Wrong is not wrong only because man's law may forbid it, and man's law may perhaps punish it. Man's law forbids it, and punishes it because it is wrong.¹

Then what shall we say of Divine law? Will this solve the problem? No doubt it will; but not unless there be some apprehension of the true sense in which it is said to be Divine. Relationship to this law, only as law or law alone, will hardly account for the shame and self-condemnation which conscience will sometimes inflict. If conscience be, in the language of Bishop Butler, "a faculty in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so," if it be that which, in the language of the same great authority, "magisterially exerts itself," and "if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own" ("Sermons," p. 23; Oxford, 1844), then must this magisterial authority of a faculty within man be delegated from a higher, a truly magisterial authority, without man and above man. To recognise the truth of the Apostle's description of the hearts of men—"their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another"—is to recognise *that*, the adequate solution of which is hardly to be found apart from the recognition of the moral law—in its relation to man's moral sense—as the law of a Personal God, the moral Governor of the world.

"While the conscience," it has been well said, "is supreme over the practical life, it is itself a subordinate faculty, and not a master faculty. What produces must be greater than the product, the Creator than what is created" (Garbett's Bampton Lectures, p. 263). In the words of Bishop Sanderson, conscience is "Deo subdita ut ministra, homini præposita ut Domina"² (Works, vol. iv., p. 23; Oxford, 1854).

It is objected that these phenomena are the result of culture—that man cultivates these perceptions in his heart as he cultivates potatoes in his garden, and that they may be cultivated in the lower animals also. But the objection well considered will be found to fortify our argument. *First*: Useful

¹ See Garbett's "Bampton Lectures," p. 259.

² Βοσποῖς ἄριστον ἢ συνείδησις Θεός (Meander as quoted by Sanderson, p. 23).

vegetables need to be *planted* by man in his garden, whereas, however perverted, a man's moral sense (whether an innate faculty itself, or a compound result of other faculties) is a part of his very nature. Wherever there is a man, there is or has been a conscience, capable, indeed, of being trained or neglected, but still *there*. And wherever there is a conscience, there is the recognition of wrong as wrong. *Next*, that which in the lower animals (as chiefly in dogs) most resembles this is found only, I believe, in those which are domesticated—never among animals in the wild state; and in this observation I am not relying on my own individual observation or opinion. Moreover, it will be found always, I believe, to stand in connection with a relation—not merely to a law, but to a person; and it will be manifested to a person in proportion as that person stands towards the animal in a recognised position more or less truly characterized as that (in some sense) of his moral governor—one who is feared and loved by the dog, known as his master, known as one whose office it is to command, to threaten, to cherish, to reward, and to punish.

II. Further, by the side of this consciousness of right and wrong—though, it may be, not consciously connected with it—is a something (in some sort) of a consciousness in man (it will hardly meet the facts of the case to say merely the *capacity* for a consciousness) of a Being (or of Beings) of a higher order than himself; with a capacity (in some sort) of something like a suitable regard for such a Being.

Till recent years, at least, a nation of atheists, a tribe without the worship of a Deity or without the recognition of spiritual beings, whose power man has to fear, has been unknown on the face of the earth. To make a people truly infidel needs a powerful mission-staff of unbelievers—needs a mighty propagandism of infidelity. So far as such a mission may be successful have we reason to think that it would improve man's condition—that it would make him more true, more human, more truly man? The annals of the French Revolution, with its reign of terror, have perhaps given us a sufficient answer. Yet the process should have made man more perfect, if this consciousness of Deity (if I may so call it) be no part of true humanity.

But man *is* a religious animal. There is something of witness to this truth even in Modern Infidelity. How often it is remarked as in honour of the unbelief in our day that it is profoundly reverential! The atheism of Tom Paine, in contrast, is the coarse atheism of raillery and buffoonery.

I have no high regard for this reverential character of our modern unbelief. (I am not speaking here of scepticism in the better sense of the word.) For the matter of consistency,

the palm must be given to the profane and blasphemous sceptic of the past. If infidelity be true, man ought to have no such feeling, no capacity for such a feeling as religious reverence. Infidelity ought to seek to expel it, wherever it rises, as a thing alien to man's true nature. Infidelity true to itself should assail it as worthy of all ridicule, not to be tolerated in man. Why does modern infidelity not do this? "Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurrit." Modern infidels have found that there is something in man's nature which revolts from infidelity in its naked deformity. Infidelity must be clothed, but it is clothed in garments which can never be made to fit it. The very denial of God is now wrapped round in a cloak which can only fitly belong to some sort of acknowledgment that there is a God. We take the testimony of the garment wherewith it hath clothed itself withal to bear witness against the modern infidelity which it clothes. This clothing testifies to the fact that there is *that* in man which has a tendency to look up, which can reverence and worship, and which can hardly be persuaded that there is no object of religious fear, or veneration, or adoration.

In these days of the opposition of science—falsely so called—I question whether enough has been made of the strictly scientific argument from the moral nature of man as he is. A recent writer of much ability has said: "It is far too easily assumed . . . that the only evidences of the existence of a Personal God are physical, metaphysical, or supernatural. The strongest of all, and those which appeal to every soul, are the moral" (Dr. Wace).

Even in his irreligion there is that in man which ought to be recognised as evidence that he is a religious being.

But, whatever may be the precise value of the testimony borne by the conscience and inner nature of man to the being and dominion of God, there is something else yet more important to be observed in this connection. The conscience, the heart, the nature of man, as man now is, is ignorant of the Deity to which it bears witness.

As apart from Revelation, the existence of a Supreme Moral Governor may be a legitimate deduction from the phenomena of conscience, but it is a deduction of which conscience itself in its operations may be said to be, for the most part, strangely unconscious. And that very inner consciousness (such as it is) which does exist, of an object of dread or of worship is, of itself, so entirely in the dark as to *Who* and *What* this object is, that the highest point to which it can attain, after rejecting the unnumbered and unworthy objects of heathen idolatry and superstition, is to set up an altar, like the men of Athens, with this inscription, "To the Unknown God."

Now, before we go further, let us pause for a moment to mark well how we have before us a view as of two atrophied faculties, cut off from the proper object of their exercise, and from the true source of their power; and in their blindness, with an unconscious instinct, seeking that to which they may cling, as the ivy seeks for the oak. And now we have to note how there comes a Revelation, which brings home to both these faculties *One Object*, which unifies the seeking of both in making known to one and the other alike that which abundantly meets the need of both, in the knowledge of the Person, and the Name, and the Glory of God.

To this conscious ignorance, and to this—shall I say unconscious conscience?—the Revelation of the Gospel speaks, and we have to inquire how it speaks.

It does more than speak: it dispels the darkness. It says “Let there be light.” We have to examine the mode of its operation.

It speaks direct to conscience with a voice of awakening. It sheds light on all which the awakened conscience needs to see and to read.

It is a strangely mistaken or perverted Gospel which seeks to stir emotions or kindle sensations without really arousing conscience to a real consciousness of God and His word, without really enlightening conscience to behold the truth of things pertaining to it, which, if seen at all, were but dimly seen as in the dark before.

Alas! how much of that which poisons the very water which men’s souls drink, and produces an unhealthy religious atmosphere for men’s souls to breathe, has arisen, and still too often does arise from such a perversion as this!

Observe how it pertains to conscience which testifies of wrong as wrong to receive the message which Revelation brings from God concerning this wrong, and to receive the light which the Gospel sheds on its relation to the law of God, and the character of God, and the perfections of God.

That which was self-accused of wrong and conscious of darkness and groping after the unknown, should now, in the gleam of light shining inward, be conscious of the known. For to the consciences of men who would offer adoration to the Unknown God, the Gospel says, as in the words of the Apostle, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.”

And in this declaration of God which comes of the Christian Revelation, there is much more than the making known of His power and supremacy. If it were only this, then would Christianity be indeed but the authoritative republication of the truths of natural religion: for “the invisible things of

God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead."

It is much more than this that is revealed to us in the Gospel. It is not merely the knowledge that God is, and that He is God over all; but it is the knowledge of this God Himself.

It is the revelation of His glory, of His holiness, of His justice, of His judgment, of the strictness and spirituality of His law, of His all-searching eye, and His all-penetrating light; and of this in its connection with man, with the body, soul, and spirit of man; with the history and the destiny of man; with the condemnation and death of man. Nor yet of this alone, but with this, of God's compassion and loving mercy for men, and of the sacrifice (to speak after the manner of men) He has made for the salvation of men, and the means He has provided for the restoration of the lost and the fallen.

Now let this declaration speak with its awakening power, and let the awakened conscience, conscious of evil, hear its voice. What will be the result? Or, to put it otherwise, let conscience, which before testified somehow of *wrong*—wrong which in its darkness it could not understand—let this conscience now be enlightened by the inward shining of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ, and how will it be affected? Why! the wrong and the evil is seen now in its true character as done not merely against law inward and outward, but against the law of God, and the God of the law; and against such a God—the God in whose favour is life. And the result of necessity is an evil conscience—yes, an *evil* conscience, *evil* because of this truth and this light—conscious of the evil of sin, conscious of the terrible evil of God's condemnation,¹ conscious of the evil of the inward troubled sea which cannot rest because of the legion—the furies (the very *Ἐρινύες* of the underlying truth in heathen mythology) which, springing out of the grave of buried sin, come home not to roost in the soul, but to torment the sleepless, restless, peaceless, lifeless, helpless, hopeless, troubled heart, conscious of its condition as in the condemned cell of exclusion from the light of God's countenance. It is the *evil* conscience which says with a true apprehension of the sense of what it says, "I have sinned against the Lord."

But herein is the glory of the Gospel, its true glory for such an evil conscience. It can tell of a fountain open for sin and for uncleanness; and therein of a power to remove from the burdened conscience the evil of which it is conscious as keeping the spirit from rest and peace and communion with God. It

¹ See Sanderson's Works, vol. iv., p. 23.

can point to the Atoning Blood and say, "Wash and be clean." It can point to the Divine seal of remission, the ordained Sacrament of regeneration, and say, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord." It can say—yea, it does say—to the penitent, believing, converted soul, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die."

And then can it not bid the spirit of man draw near to God in the holy calm and peace of sin forgiven, even to that holy God who dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto?—yes, draw near to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in full assurance of faith, having the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, even as the body washed with the pure water of baptism, of baptism which thus saveth us not as the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but by the answer of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

And if it be thus that the conscience is acted upon in the reception of the Gospel and in the first operation of its power, it will not be difficult to deal with the questions which pertain to the functions of conscience in the subsequent new life of the Christian.

After this, when the heart has been sprinkled from an evil conscience, when the conscience has been purged from dead works, when the burden and woe of the evil answer has been taken away and has given place to the answer of a good conscience towards God, not through the consciousness of any good in itself, but by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, then and not till then does conscience enter into the full possession of her powers and sit exalted on her true throne.

Enlightened now by the knowledge of God's will and of God Himself, and made tender by the consciousness of the new relationship in which the sinful soul stands to a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, how sensitive it will be as regards the thoughts and intents of the heart, as regards the motives and impulses and desires of the soul! how sensitive of even the fine dust which may rest on the Spirit of adoption, which, crying "Abba! Father," testifies of the truth and reality of adoption and regeneration!

The normal condition of souls in the consciousness of this new relation is described in the words of the Apostle: "Wherefore we labour (or it is our high ambition), that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him (or, rather, may be well pleasing to Him)." And the normal condition of conscience in such souls is reflected in the saying, "Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man."

Thus is the Christian conscience to be kept as the noonday clear, or to follow a simile of St. Bernard, as the polished surface of the mirror when unspotted and undimmed it gives a faithful reflection of the truth in the sunlight.

Doubtless the looking-glass, to be kept bright, will need a daily cleansing, and the conscience a daily washing. It is that washing of which the Saviour spake, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit"; and of which His Apostle writes, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us (is continually purifying us) from all sin."

And the more nearly this normal condition of soul and conscience is attained and maintained, doubtless the more perfect will be the character, as a Christian character.

It may, unhappily, be very imperfectly attained even by those who are not strangers to the power of the Gospel; but in such cases it will be found, I believe, that the defects in the operation of conscience in matters of conduct and life are connected with a deficient apprehension by the conscience of those truths by which the Gospel should operate through the conscience on the heart. Observe how the operation of conscience in the Christian is connected in Scripture with the operation of faith—"Holding faith and a good conscience," writes St. Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. i. 19). And he had said a little before, "The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (v. 5). Again he writes to Titus, "Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure: but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus i. 15). And in cases of the deterioration of character through a process of gradual searing of conscience, causing a dumbness of its witness and an acquiescence in wrong-doing, there will surely be found an inward darkness in the chambers of conscience, causing an insensibility to the light and truth which tell of sin and reconciliation. And the recovery can only be by the removal of this. The Spirit of God must take of the things of Christ and show them to the dark soul, and then conscience will be deaf no more and dumb no more. "He maketh the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

In this hasty sketch, which (as I am very sensible) has touched upon rather than attempted to deal, even superficially, with a great and very important subject, I have been desirous of pointing to the correction of certain errors, more or less prevalent, on the subject of conscience in relation to Revelation, and with a few cautions in reference to these I conclude.

If the view I have taken be the true view, conscience unenlightened by Revelation is not competent to sit as a judge of Revelation. This needs to be clearly seen and distinctly enforced.

1. There is a very wide difference, indeed, though it seems sometimes altogether overlooked, between the true claim of the Christian Revelation to be able to commend itself—to carry its own evidence—to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and the false claim of man's conscience to exercise a judicial verifying faculty in the examination of that Revelation.

The unopened eye in its darkness is no competent judge of the claims of light on its acceptance. I cannot tell what light is, or what light should be; but to the opened eyes of the blind, light can yet commend itself—can take its own evidences to man's sight, and constrain the once all-dark to say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

2. No exercise or operation of conscience by itself must be allowed to impede, or be thought to supersede, the due exercise and operation of the Gospel on and through the conscience.

Yet the true effect of the Gospel on the conscience is impeded, indeed, whenever the answer of a good conscience—falsely so called—is made to satisfy the heart to the exclusion of the true knowledge and conviction of man's sin for his condemnation, and of Christ's righteousness for his justification.

3. Conscience is not to be co-ordinated with the Gospel as a means pertaining to man's acceptance with God. Conscience and Revelation are not to be regarded as separate side-by-side sources of Divine guidance into the way of peace.

So far as conscience is a law—God's unwritten law—its office is (like that of the written law) to bring us to Christ, and to Christ for justification. And the Apostolic warning against the attempt to combine an adherence to the two covenants will surely apply in full force to the exclusion of the law of conscience from having any place whatever as a law tending to justification in the kingdom of God's grace.

It is but to translate the Apostle's language, or to transfer his pointing from the moral law written on stones to the moral law written on the heart, to say, "Christ is become of none effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by conscience, ye are fallen from grace."

4. Conscience is to be no court of appeal from Revelation. So far as conscience may be regarded as a judge, it may be said in some sense to hold office under Revelation. It sits in a court which was darkened by man's sin, and which is still liable to be beclouded by temptation and made dim by human infirmity, and all the true light of which is derived from the

Gospel—from the knowledge of God revealed to us in Christ. And the appeal must always lie from that which received light to that from which the light is derived.

5. But in this subordination of conscience to the Gospel, it must not be supposed for a moment there is any making light of the true dictates of conscience either before or after its illumination by the Truth; nor any want of recognition of that which is truly Divine in conscience, even in man's fallen state by nature. It is only, indeed, by the coming of the light that the Divine can be clearly separated from the human. But conscience everywhere has within it that which is Divine—a something of heaven buried amid the ruins of man's spiritual desolation. And its faintest breathings have a sacredness beyond anything that is of nature natural, that is of the earth earthy, that is of man human.

And the conscientiousness which glories in a so-called good conscience—never made good by the purging of atoning blood—restraining at the same time from the commission of what it regards as grievous sin, and from the acknowledgment and conviction of all sin, determining “*nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa*”—this, we may be sure, never comes from the soul's really hearkening, as with a sacred stillness, to listen to that which is Divine indeed in the voice of human conscience.

Wide asunder as heaven and earth (I believe I might say truly and very reverently, as wide asunder as heaven and hell) are these two motive restraining principles too often confounded—the first which says, “How can I do such a deed as this, which would compel me to class myself with the publican as a vile wretch; to cast away my own righteousness; to smite upon my breast and say, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner?’” and the other, which teaches the believing, loving heart to say, “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

The one—call it conscientiousness, if you will (it is often so called)—is that which does not come of any real sacred hearkening to that which is truly Divine; for God's voice and God's word will always be found to testify to man of wrong which is sin—sin against law and sin against God; and to hearken to God's voice will never lead the heart of man to deny God's testimony and make God a liar.

The other is that which comes of putting away flattering self-deceptions which darken the chambers of conscience, receiving the truth in its power to condemn, and to make conscience itself condemn, the sin and the sinner; and then by a personal reconciliation accepting the gift of justification and life in Christ Jesus, with the experience of new light,

new life, and new creative power, learning to hate sin as sin—as sin against God, against a reconciled loving Father in heaven—and being truly taught by Divine teaching to do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

N. DIMOCK.



ART. II.—ON SOME FORMS OF THE PSALTER: LXX.,
P.B.V., AND DOUAY—II.

THE last phenomenon to which we wish to refer is one of frequent occurrence. It is where undoubted corruptions (as opposed to mistranslations) have crept into the text, sometimes affecting all known MSS., sometimes a section only. To show how rife corruption was and how early it set in, we will cite the case of Gen. xv. 15, "Thou shalt be buried." Here, so far as we are aware, without a single exception, all MSS. of the LXX. read, not *ταφείς*, as they should, and as, of course, was read by the original LXX., but *τραφείς* (reared), and it is on this latter reading that Philo's comments are based. We thus see that the false reading was dominant by or before the Christian era.

We now subjoin instances from the LXX., *a few out of a large number*. It will be noticed that in no case has the P.B.V. been affected by the corruption; but in some cases it has run on into the Latin, and so affected the Douay version. It will be understood that in the following list, unless the contrary is stated, the corruption is found in the three great MSS., *Σ*, *A*, *B*. This seems to us a highly-suggestive fact for those who preach that even in the Old Testament the reading of Cod. B is to be humbly accepted. It surely is inexplicable that, in the case of undoubted and demonstrable corruptions, which are not blunders of the original translators, but due to the carelessness or the wilfulness of copyists, these should not be relegated to the margin, and no longer be allowed a place in the text of modern printed editions of the LXX. Let us call attention specially to No. 2 of the subjoined list.

- (1) iv. 8: "Since the time. . ." The LXX. read *καρποῦ* instead of *καιροῦ*. So the Douay, "fruit."
- (2) xvii. 15: "They have children at their desire." Here, for *υἱῶν*, Codd. *Σ*, *B* (not *A*), and some cursive MSS., read *υείων*. "They are sated with swine's flesh." So the unrevised Old Latin, "saturati sunt suillam."
- (3) xxxii. 6: "The wickedness of my sin." In LXX. "of my heart." The *καρδίας* has, of course, been a corruption of *ἀμαρτίας*.