

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

less than the clergy, are influenced by their environment ; and just as the Episcopal Church in Ireland, surrounded by Romanism, is uniformly "Low," so in Scotland, surrounded by Presbyterianism, it is uniformly "High."

It has been the writer's aim to state facts rather than offer opinions, but the reader will perhaps bear with him if he states a single conclusion that has often forced itself upon him during his many years north of the Tweed. It is, that if the Church of England organized and trusted her laity as much as does her sister Church in Scotland, and made as much of her pounds as her poorer sister does of her shillings, the task of the Non-conformist would be much harder than it is.



The Climax of Revelation.

BY THE REV. W. B. RUSSELL CALEY, M.A.

THERE are only three special theophanies in Scripture, or times at which God in a special manner revealed His character and attributes to men—occasions perfectly different to those revelations in dreams and visions and voices which He constantly made to His prophets and servants, but absolutely unique in their solemnity and circumstances ; occasions on which Deity, in a mysterious and awe-inspiring manner, made itself manifest to humanity with stupendous grandeur, yet with necessary and well-defined limits of power and splendour.

These three remarkable occasions on which God "made His glory to appear," and man saw God (in a sense) and yet lived, are—the giving of the law (Exod. xix.), the revelation to Moses (Exod. xxxiii., xxxiv.), and the revelation to Elijah (2 Kings xix.). All these theophanies are marked by an extraordinary similarity, and are attended by the same results. Each manifestation is marked by a wondrous exhibition of power and of purity, and is then succeeded by an articulate and distinct indication and expression of the Divine will. They are unrelated in many

ways, and yet they have a most clear and instructive relationship, and we shall do well to study them.

The mythologies and legends of other religions bear no comparison with this; they tell us oftentimes of wonder and power and swift justice, and even familiarity with human passions and frailties, but none of them display or attract by a revelation of interested love. We may learn much of God in Nature. To the observant mind we are surrounded by overwhelming proofs of His wisdom, power, and purity; we see on all hands indications of design and harmony and beauty. But while Nature may tell us much of the mind of God, it is only revelation can tell us of His heart. "For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, even His eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. i. 20). Yet "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. ii. 14). Revelation is essential if we are really to know God, and this revelation in the Word we enjoy.

Now, (1) in each of these three cases man is clearly taught that he *cannot* and *must* not attempt to search into the deep things of God; self-will in this respect is described as terrible in its consequences. The most stringent commands were given to Moses to erect bounds about Mount Sinai, lest anyone should draw near, prompted by an unhallowed curiosity, and perish (Exod. xix. 12, 21-25). Most carefully does God hide Moses himself in a cleft of the rock, lest he should see more than his human nature could endure of Divine splendour (Exod. xxxiii. 20-23). Elijah had to wrap his face in his mantle when the Divine voice spoke to him (1 Kings xix. 13).

In the revelation to Elijah, which we desire to consider, we have a fourfold revelation, which is both historic and also spiritually accurate in its order :

- (a) The Revelation of Power—Wind (ver. 11).
- (b) The Revelation of Terror—Earthquake (ver. 11).
- (c) The Revelation of Purity—Fire (ver. 12).
- (d) The Revelation of Love—Voice (ver. 13).

This is not a chance, but in reality a scientific and correct order. These successive manifestations sum up for us the religious systems of the world. There were the ancient religions of power, when men trembled before the tremendous and uncontrollable forces of Nature, when the thunder and the storm and the hurricane made them realize their own powerlessness in the presence of what was to them omnipotence; and thence came the religions of Thor and Jupiter, and the worship of the powers of Nature.

But this very realization of power brought as its consequence the feeling of terror, of helpless impotence and need of protection. These powers, so awful in their activity and presence, must be conciliated and, if possible, made propitious rather than destructive to man; and thence came idolatry—a desperate attempt on the part of humanity to put himself in a favourable relationship with powers beyond his control, be those powers good or evil.

But a yet deeper thought followed on. Man, with increasing knowledge and experience, with a widening conception of himself and his environment, saw behind these forces and exhibitions of terrific energy and splendour a revelation of purity. There was no mistaking that He who set all this machinery going, and had made man what he was, in his mind and spirit, was a God of holiness—one far above the ordinary passions and vices of debased human nature; and thence arose the philosophies of the world—its cold intellectual religions, its desperate attempts to free itself from natural, innate corruption by a great striving after purity and altruism and moral perfection.

The philosophers of Greece and Rome, Confucius in China, Buddha in India, testified to this yearning after purity of life or elevation of intellect; but it was a mere intellectual ideal, a moral standard, true in much of its conception, but quite inaccessible to human attainment. This was as far as man could go. He witnessed to his greatness, to his spiritual capabilities, by his heroic attempts to put himself in correct

relationship with the Great First Cause he dimly discerned; he "felt after God, if haply he might find Him" (Acts xvii. 27). But there was one thing that no speculation or search of man could discover, and that was the feelings of God towards man; whether God entertained any sentiments of love or affection towards man, or merely viewed him as the creature of His hand and the subject of His power. This revelation could only possibly come from God Himself. Now, it is this last revelation of *interested love* which alone has changed the life and character of all ages and all races.

It was God's love which desired that none of the people should foolishly break through to gaze on Sinai, and thus certainly perish; it was His love which sheltered Moses in the cleft of the rock; it was His love which so sweetly and gently spoke to Elijah, yet so mysteriously that he hid his face in his mantle and was preserved. These revelations were, as all revelation must really be, progressive. God reveals Himself to man as man is able to bear it. He does not blind his eyes by torrents of Divine splendour, but He gradually prepares man to understand His nature and work and purpose. Professor Mozley has beautifully expressed this truth in these words: "It is evident, then, that a progressive revelation, if the idea of such a revelation is once admitted, must be judged by its end, and not by its beginning. According to any rule of judging in such cases, the morality of a progressive dispensation is not the morality with which it starts, but with which it concludes. The test is not the commencement, but the result." Or, as Professor Orr puts it, "Revelation must begin somewhere, and must work patiently in accordance with the law of historical developments. This is the true side of the law of evolution, and it applies in grace as well as in Nature."

We learn, then, that the highest and fullest revelation of God is not to be found in Nature, or by human intellect, but it is seen in His love and personal interest in man as revealed in His Holy Word. This quick but certain revelation of interested love is the great power for the Church generally and the individual

personally. What is the message the universal Church is telling to-day to the hearts and consciences of all men? It is the message of God's interested love in each soul, in each life. Home missions, foreign missions, rescue work, Salvation Army, Church Army—each attempts to bring home to the individual soul this question as from God Himself: "What doest *thou* here?"

But we must ever remember that this revelation of interested love is in no way contradictory to the other and equally true revelations of power, purity, and terror. Science and intellect can assure us of the truth of these, can endorse and emphasize them. They are all real aspects of truth, but they *are not* the aspects which will most effectually and permanently and beneficially influence life and action.

In this last revelation we have reached the climax, we have arrived at the last stage of God's self-manifestation. The Old Testament economy taught us much of the previous manifestations of the Divine character; its awful calamities, its terrible penalties, its minute moral regulations and commands, showed men the power and purity and terror of the Lord; but it is the "voice" in the New Testament, the voice of Jesus, which teaches us in words such as never man spake before of the love of the Heavenly Father for each one of His erring, sorrowful, sinful children. Revelation hitherto has been just a light shining in a dark place, yet ever shining more and more brightly until it flooded the earth with the sunlight of love at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. To quote Professor Orr again: "Progressive revelation has culminated in Christ. In Christ the long development of Old Testament religion finds its fulfilment and point of repose. To understand the Old Testament aright we must look to this goal to which all roads lead. Prophecy does not let fall one element that was of permanent value in the law. Christianity conserves every jot and tittle of the spiritual contents of both law and prophets." Yet it was when Christ came and walked the hills and fields of Galilee, and touched with joy and peace and love the sad hearts and homes of men, and "went about doing good," that mankind saw and realized,

and felt as they never had done before, that "God is *love*," and that He *individually loved* them.

It is truly a magnificent message the Church has to carry to-day to the weary and sin-stricken world—the message of God's love for each one. It may not be as impressive or awe-inspiring as a merely natural religion is sometimes represented to be; it may not appeal so much as some to the intellect (for Christianity approaches the intellect through the conscience, not the conscience through the intellect); but it speaks in tones of resistless power and persuasiveness, in the quiet of the conscience and heart and home, and calls with an earnestness none can lightly resist to duty and work and self-sacrifice.

Lastly, let us notice that this revelation of interested love has the same results in each case.

(a) *Reverence*.—When the people saw the thunderings and lightnings and smoking mountain, they stood afar off and said to Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. xx. 18-20). When Moses saw the glory of God and heard His loving words, he bowed his head and worshipped (Exod. xxxiv. 8), while Elijah hid his face in his mantle and stood to listen. It will ever be so: the more we realize the personal love of God towards us, the more we shall feel a holy awe towards Him—not the terror of the slave, but the affectionate deference of the child.

(b) *Confession of Unworthiness*.—The Israelites acknowledged at Sinai their unworthiness to hear God's voice. Moses pleaded that He would pardon their iniquity and their sin, and take them for His people (Exod. xxxiv. 9); while Elijah owns his own unworthiness, and in action declares his humility before God.

(c) *Obedient Service*.—While the silent awe-struck multitude stood before the shaking, smoking, lightning-lit mountain, Moses tells them of all the statutes and judgments which the Lord commanded them (Exod. xxi. 1). Following on the revelation to himself, Moses instantly and strenuously exhorts to obedience of the most complete and far-reaching character (Exod. xxxiv. 11); while Elijah departs at once to anoint Elisha and fulfil the Divine behest.

The revelation of the personal love of God, as expressed through the voice and words of Jesus Christ, is the climax of revelation ; it is the manifestation of the heart of the Eternal to the wondering gaze of humanity. Far from promoting irreverence or self-satisfaction on the part of man, it excites in him the profoundest reverence, the deepest awe, the most sincere humility, and the truest, self-denying service.

Have we had this realization of God's personal love to us brought home to our own hearts? Do we feel we love Him because He first loved us? This will not make our conception of God less great or less grand, but we shall realize the Divine holiness, as manifested in Calvary's sacrifice, with an intense reverence ; our unworthiness of such love will make our whole being go out in rapturous and whole-hearted service ; we shall rejoice to run the way of God's commandments with a most loyal obedience. Yes, the revelation of God's interested love is the keynote of a happy life, of a holy life, of a useful life.



Literary Notes.

ONE of the most interesting of new magazines which have commenced their existence during the past few months, in this already overcrowded age of periodical literature, is that very attractive monthly called "The Country Home." It is a well-arranged magazine, pleasantly written, delightfully illustrated, and redolent of its title. Its editor, who is evidently a person of cultured and refined taste, has been fortunate enough to secure a Nature poem by Mr. Meredith for the current (July) number. Several new features have been added to this number, the tone of which does, somehow, appeal to all lovers of the country, even though they live in the town. But more particularly has it a call for those who reside in the country, though the residence be a cottage rather than a castle.



A new missionary story has been written by Miss Mary D'Aguilar, under the title of "Coverleigh Rectory." It would be an advantage if one could, at such times as prize-giving in Sunday-schools, put one's hand on more literature of, for want of a better term, the "lighter kind," dealing with missionary life and character. The present story gives a good account of what the life of a missionary is ; its joys and its sorrows, its advantages and disadvantages, its successes and its failures. From personal experience in