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BOOK REVIEWS

HOW SHALL WE CONCEIVE THE PERSONALITY OF GOD?¹

The most searching inquiry of the religious mind today is concerning the possibility of a definite belief in God. The popular theology of past centuries made frank use of anthropomorphic analogies, and succeeded in bringing to clear consciousness the conception of a definite personal figure with whom men might have intimate relationships. But as the principles of modern scientific and philosophical thinking have become dominant, the older anthropomorphism becomes incredible, and the loved picture of God as a compassionate Father grows dim. If the Christian faith is to persist in its accustomed form, some way must be found in which to make real the idea of personality in God.

It is to this task that Mr. Webb devotes himself in the Gifford Lectures. His previous studies in the field of theological and philosophical thought in antiquity and during the Middle Ages admirably equip him for an exact and historically correct understanding of the precise meaning of theological terminology in the history of Christian thinking. From the point of view of literature, the lectures are a delight. The author is thoroughly at home in his subject, he possesses a charming style, and his spirit of fairness and courtesy is unflinching. The wealth of allusions, the many side lights, and the attempt to do justice to all phases of a question furnish an unusually stimulating discussion. Yet there is preserved an exactness of philosophical reasoning, and an insistence on some abstruse considerations, which lead one to marvel at the intellectual capacity of the audience which listened to these discussions without the aid of the printed page.

Mr. Webb attempts first by a critical study of historical phases of thought to ascertain exactly what the concept of personality means. It cannot be said that he succeeds in giving us a very definite picture. But the fault lies in the difficulty of the concept itself. The definition

¹ *God and Personality*. (Gifford Lectures, 1918 and 1919: First Course.) By Clement C. J. Webb. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1918; New York: Macmillan. 281 pages. \$3.00.

Divine Personality and Human Life. (Gifford Lectures, 1918 and 1919: Second Course.) By Clement C. J. Webb. London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1920. 291 pages. \$3.00.

of Boethius, *Persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*, is considered, on the whole, as about the best description available. On the basis of this definition attempts are made to differentiate personality from mere individuality and from mere rationality. It is discovered that what is really important in the concept of personality is the possibility of social relationships between persons. But the Boethian definition, designed as it is to analyze metaphysical substance, is a poor starting-point for the discussion of the social implications of personality. Those who are accustomed to thinking in terms of modern social psychology will feel the discussion to be curiously medieval in spirit and method.

One of the interesting and valuable conclusions of Mr. Webb is that Christian theology, until very recent times, has never ventured to affirm the personality *of* God. It has asserted personality *in* God. God is not *a* person. This would be such an individualizing of him that he could no longer be considered the Absolute. The doctrine of a finite God is hopelessly wrecked here. But there is that in the character of the Absolute which makes possible reciprocal personal relationships between God and the worshiper. This personality *in* God, Mr. Webb finds to be well stated in the Christian doctrine of the trinity, with its three "persons" in the Godhead.

The evidence for this personal aspect of the divine nature is to be found exclusively in the religious experience of personal communion with God. While this conception may be made rationally plausible, it is yet possible to defend other conceptions of the Absolute if the testimony of the religious consciousness be left out of account. The whole case, then, rests ultimately on the testimony of a profound religious consciousness. The book thus is really a very careful and suggestive study of definitions. Granted the legitimacy of the testimony of the mystic consciousness, Mr. Webb asks how we may best think of the transcendent source of that personal relationship which we experience in religion. It is evident that those who demand a study based on the history of religions will not find it here. The argument moves entirely in the older field of definition of concepts. The author seems to be almost unaware of the interest which modern students find in tracing the psychological and social genesis of concepts.

The second course follows in the footsteps of the first. The various aspects of our human life are considered, and it is argued that the fields of economics, science, aesthetics, morals, politics, and religion are all better interpreted with the help of the conception of personality in the Absolute than by any other alternative. There are, of course, suggestive

considerations at every turn; but the general positions are, on the whole, very familiar to students of apologetics. In short, the two volumes are valuable chiefly as an apologetic for that concept of God which was developed by the Christian thinkers who employed the categories and the method of Greek metaphysics. And if the metaphysical presuppositions be granted, it is a most effective presentation. What many readers will miss is an apprehension of the problems presented by the empirical point of view embodied in modern psychology and history.

GERALD BIRNEY SMITH

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE SOCIAL IDEALS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

This is a book on theory, not history. The author is attempting to point out what the people thought on social matters in a given period, regardless of the practice of the time or of the historical basis of their theories. Following the chronology of the modern school, he classifies the materials of the Old Testament in four large sections; viz., "The Age of the Patriarchs"; "Moses to Samuel"; "The Monarchy"; and "The Exilic and Post-Exilic Epoch." All the New Testament materials are used without discrimination in the two chapters composing the last one-third of the book, the one on the "Christian Ideal" and the other on the "Social Institutions of Early Christianity." His warrant for so doing is that this book takes as its unit the doctrine of an epoch, not of individual teachers. Again the writer is interested, not in origins, but in use.

Two important assumptions underlie the entire development of the thesis: (1) in the Bible, sociology waits upon theology, and (2) the theory of society is naturally a branch of ethics. The author's ethical creed is evolutionary, idealistic, and Christian. One is therefore impressed that the book as a whole is a fairly good biblical theology, for, as the author holds, his sociology constantly merges into theology. This is the more clearly brought out when it is noted that in the compilation of the present book from the original thesis, three important social topics—"Work," "Womanhood," and "Wealth"—have been omitted, and that "yet without them the book has perhaps a true unity." With the omission of such important materials, one scarcely hopes to find unity from the social point of view.

¹ *The Bible Doctrine of Society in Its Historical Evolution.* Charles Ryder Smith. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. xviii+400 pages. 18s.