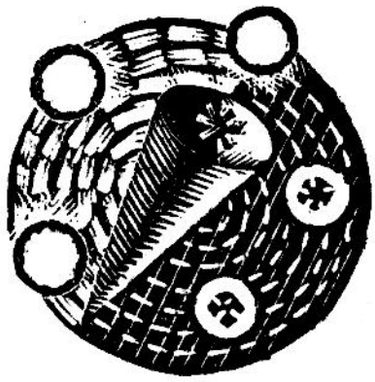
THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GOOD LIFE



CHARLES GORE

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INTRODUCTION FOR EVERYMAN

THERE is no harder task than to state precisely what are the beliefs and practices of the Church of England, Englishmen as a whole having an idea that in religion, as in all other spheres of thought and action, they shall not be bound too tightly by logic and consistency. It would therefore be presumptuous to select one man as the typical English Churchman, for he exists no more than that equally complex character, the Man in the Street. The nearest approach to the former would be a man who had gained the general respect and admiration of all parties within and without the Church, who profoundly affected the thought of the Church, who represented in no small degree her three facets, Catholic, Evangelical, and Modernist, and yet whose convictions and beliefs were acknowledged to be of the deepest and sincerest nature. If we should seek for such a man, worthy to represent the Church of England before the modern world, we need look no further than Charles Gore.

Gore was ordained priest in 1878 at the age of twenty-five, and was soon prominently associated with the social —as distinct from the intellectual—side of the Church by founding the Christian Social Union (1880) and the Community of the Resurrection (1887). That was a period during which the High Church or Anglo-Catholic party steered an erratic course. The brilliance of the original Tractarians was for the most part lost to it, and crises such as that created by the Gorham case had revealed an intellectual weakness that boded ill for the future of the movement which has since become so vital to the life of the Church. But, as is so often the case, the demands of the moment forced a natural leader to the front. In 1889 appeared the significant symposium entitled *Lux Mundi*, which announced its aim as 'an attempt to succour a distressed faith by endeavouring to bring the Christian

Creed into its right relation to the modern growth of knowledge, scientific, historic, critical; and to modern problems of politics and ethics.' The essayists, led by Gore, were High Churchmen and successors of the older Tractarians. But instead of the glorying in 'No Compromise,' the dogmatic assertions and harsh controversial tone to which the world was accustomed from this quarter, the essays revealed an economy of dogma, a deeper and more sympathetic tone, and, frequently, an unexpected attempt to reconcile much of the advanced textual and literary criticism of the Old Testament with the traditional teaching of the Church. Gore's own article on the Holy Spirit claimed chief attention in this respect, and its effect was so electric that even the most complacent of men were startled by what appeared to be an intellectual somersault.

From then until his death Gore was not only accepted as the chief exponent of the movement but affected the Church as a whole more than any other man of his time, and there is no better evidence of the consistency of his attitude than *The New Commentary on Holy Scripture* and this book, *The Philosophy of the Good Life*, both issued within the last few years of his life.

It must not be thought that Gore's work of reconciliation meant that he was an advocate of compromise. He was a staunch upholder of the creeds and tradition of the Church, one who held that ordination should be refused to any one who did not *ex animo* accept the Synoptists' account of the Virgin Birth, and whose resignation from the See of Oxford was partly brought about by the decision not to make Confirmation the condition of admission to the Electoral Roll of the Church of England. He believed that, although in this world we must not expect complete intellectual and moral satisfaction, Christianity is capable of rational interpretation. He saw every reason, therefore, for welcoming honest research into the basis of Christianity and held that while it was the Church's duty to emphasize that, ultimately, Christianity is a life to be lived rather than a theological system to be accepted, she should distinguish between the true and false conclusions of such research. This may well be thought

a tremendous task for a Church that does not claim infallibility, but it says much for the faith and courage of men like Charles Gore.

F. W.

The following is a list of Gore's chief works, with the date of their appearance:

The Church and the Ministry, 1889; *Roman Catholic Claims*, 1889; *The Mission of the Church*, 1891; *The Incarnation of the Son of God* (Bampton Lectures), 1891; *Dissertations on Subjects connected with the Incarnation*, 1895; *The Creed of the Christian*, 1895; *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1896; *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1898; *Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*, 1898; *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1899; *The Body of Christ*, 1901; *Spiritual Efficiency*, 1904; *The Permanent Creed*, 1905; *The New Theology and the Old Religion*, 1908; *Orders and Unity*, 1910; *The Question of Divorce*, 1911; *The Religion of the Church*, 1916; *The Epistles of St. John*, 1920; *Christian Moral Principles*, 1921; *Belief in God*, 1921; *The Deity of Christ*, 1922; *Belief in Christ*, 1922; *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, 1924; *Can we then Believe?* 1926; *Christ and Society*, 1928; *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1929; *The Philosophy of the Good Life*, 1930.

He also wrote a number of small pamphlets and tracts such as *Lambeth on Contraceptives* (1930), and edited the following, generally making important contributions: *Lux Mundi*, 1889; *Romanes' Thoughts on Religion*, 1894; *Essays on Church Reform*, 1898; *Good Citizenship*, 1899; *The New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 1928.

Studies of Gore may be found in *Charles Gore: Father and Son* (1932), by J. Gore, and *Edward Stuart Talbot and Charles Gore* (1935), by Dr. Mansbridge.

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PREFACE

THE divisions of this book are entitled 'chapters,' but it will be plain to every reader that they are in fact the printed record of lectures—twelve lectures delivered during the winter of 1929–30 before the University of St. Andrews on the foundation of Lord Gifford; and that I have not attempted to alter their character. The fact that they are lectures must be my excuse for some obvious repetitions, such as seemed to be necessary if what was to be said was to be made intelligible to an audience which did not consist entirely of the same persons on each occasion. It is also to be borne in mind that the lectures were intended to be intelligible to an audience not mainly consisting of expert philosophers. In the introductory lecture I have sufficiently explained the nature of the subject to be dealt with, and the special purpose of the lecturer.

Some years ago in *The Reconstruction of Belief* I published what was intended to be a systematic *apologia* for the Christian Faith. Nothing of the sort is attempted in this book. My subject is the idea of the good life as it is to be found in history. Half of the book consists of the historical survey; after which I analyse the presuppositions both of the 'idealist' and the more definitely 'monotheist' presentations of the good life, and finally in the four last lectures I endeavour to show the superior rationality of the 'monotheist' presuppositions in their Christian form. Those who are disposed to agree with

my reasonings will then be able to approach what are called the Christian 'evidences' without any hostile prejudice.

I do not know that there is anything more that need be said by way of preface. But I must be allowed to express my cordial thanks to the University of St. Andrews—alike professors, lecturers, and students—for the kindness with which they received me and for the happy weeks which I passed in their beautiful and historic city.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my neighbour the Rev. Christopher Cheshire for having read the lectures before they went to press and made a number of useful suggestions.

C. G.

27 EATON TERRACE,
LONDON, S.W.
August 1930.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

§ 1

CALLED to the honourable post of a Gifford lecturer in this University of St. Andrews, I have, of course, studied the Trust Disposition and Settlement of the late Lord Gifford, or the portion of it relevant to the lecturers, and find myself able to correspond heartily with his intentions.

First, he intended the lectures delivered under his Trust Deed to have for their object 'the promoting, advancing, teaching, and diffusing the study of Natural Theology, in the widest sense of that term, in other words, the knowledge of God . . . the knowledge of His nature and attributes, the knowledge of the relations which men and the whole Universe bear to Him, the knowledge of the nature and foundation of Ethics and Morals, and of all the Obligations and Duties thence arising.'

Secondly, the lectures were to be the expression of the free individual opinion of the lecturer, whether his conclusions on the momentous subject, or group of subjects, assigned to him should turn out to be positive and constructive, or negative and destructive, or purely sceptical. He must speak as one bound by no formula or standard of belief as constraining either himself or his hearers. He must express simply the ideas or

conclusions arrived at in the exercise of his own rational powers, and, of course, the arguments or motives which had led him to such ideas or conclusions, arguments or motives which might lead other individual minds along the same road to the same goal, whether of affirmation, denial, or doubt. So I interpret in my own words Lord Gifford's fourth and fifth requirements.

Thirdly, the lectures were to be 'popular,' in the sense, I suppose, that the lecturer, dealing with a subject or group of subjects which is of vital importance for every man, and taking it for granted that those who listen to him would be fairly educated men and women, capable of following a philosophical train of thought, should at the same time avoid as much as possible the technical language which is commonly used among philosophical and theological experts, and should explain it where he is obliged to use it, taking nothing for granted but the average intelligence of the educated person. So I interpret Lord Gifford's sixth requirement—the rest, which I have not noticed, concerning only details of arrangement and in no way the substance of the lectures.

But I must notice one desire expressed by Lord Gifford which, I am told, has been generally ignored—that, besides giving public lectures, the lecturer should also have personal contact with those who attend his lectures, so that they might have the opportunity to 'heckle' him with their personal questionings. I heartily desire to correspond with the Founder's intention in this respect.[1]

The above requirements, then, I can accept with a hearty goodwill. The subject—whether there be some-

[1] The lectures as they stand in print have been a good deal altered from what was originally spoken (at least in detail) as a result in part of such personal contacts.

thing eternal behind this changing universe of things and persons, whether and in what sense there be a God or gods, and, if there be, of what sort is the divine nature and what is man's relation to it—is the fundamental problem of philosophy. I suppose it is unlikely that any one who was asked for a description of your present lecturer would describe him as a philosopher. But if a 'philosopher'—that is, a lover of wisdom—means a man whose spirit can find no rest unless he can gain and keep some 'theory' or vision of the world of things and experiences, such as shall enable him to interpret its manifold phenomena as parts of one whole, and as expressive in some sort of one purpose, in which he himself is called to co-operate with will and intelligence—if that be the meaning of a philosopher, then, though defective knowledge and capacity may render me a poor specimen of the class, certainly I am a philosopher.

For though the vision or theory which I have gained or can hope to gain may be sadly imperfect—something seen 'through a glass darkly' or 'a scheme imperfectly comprehended'—yet I never could endure to desist from the philosophic quest. I never could tolerate with any degree of equanimity the idea of keeping the findings of different fields of thought or experience in separate mental compartments, paying no attention to their inconsistency.

Again, to pass to the second requirement described above, in that quest I could never endure to be otherwise than a free-thinker. I mean by that that whatever obligation I may have inherited or contracted to any traditional system of belief or thought, I could never allow it to blind me to anything which might seem to

be truth, whatever its origin, or to shackle me so that I could not follow the light of reason whithersoever it should lead.

I say this of myself with trembling, for experience of life and of books leads one to feel how very difficult it is to be really a free-thinker. Orthodox theologians are supposed to be more especially liable to become the slaves of illegitimate prejudice—to be men whose eyes are blinded to unwelcome truths and who 'reason in chains.' But, reading the books of men who have obviously rebelled against every kind of orthodoxy, I seem to see that even extreme reaction against established opinion affords no kind of security against prejudice. The rebels appear to find it at least as hard to recognize the strong points in the positions of their adversaries in debate as do the orthodox. But recognizing the difficulty, we must not give up the struggle to be fully open-eyed to the light from whatever source it comes, and we must, if we would be worthy of the name of lovers of wisdom, pledge ourselves solemnly and seriously to refuse no conclusion, however unpalatable, which on serious consideration appears to be true.

It is of course the case that every man's opinions in science, theology, or morals have owed in one way or another a vast deal to authority, whether it be the authority of home or class or nation, or of some church or organization, or of some individual, philosopher or poet or prophet—whether, I may add, the authority ultimately constrains him to obedience or drives him to rebellion. When Dr. A. N. Whitehead defines religion as 'what the individual does with his own solitariness,'[1] he is expressing, no doubt, a very im-

[1] *Religion in the Making*, p. 6.