

GS259

DOGMA *versus* MORALITY.



A

REPLY TO CHURCH CONGRESS.

BY

CHARLES VOYSEY, B.A.,

INCUMBENT OF HEALAUGH, NEAR TADCASTER.

SECOND THOUSAND.

LONDON :

TRÜBNER AND CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1866.

*Price Threepence.*

LETTER TO CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHURCH

CHURCH

CHURCH

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

## PREACHED AT HEALAUGH,

SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21ST, 1866.

---

1 JOHN iii. 7.—“*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.*”

---

THE week before last, at a Congress of Bishops and Clergy held at York, a dignitary of the church is reported to have said, that it was “better to have a religion without morality than morality without a religion.” As I have not the exact words before me, I will not mention the name of the speaker; but, as far as I could gather from the report, the whole speech was intended to advocate the necessity for a dogmatic creed, and to shew the superiority of creed over practice. Painful as such a view must be both to you and to myself, I am not at all surprised at a Church dignitary putting it forth, nor at the applause with which it was received by the assembled clergy.

For, indeed, I have often before heard it expressed and implied, in different ways, and in different degrees of shamelessness. Some High Churchmen have as good as denied the possibility of being righteous, without being baptised and

partaking of the Lord's Supper; and Evangelicals have gone so far as to say, that a moral life was a hindrance, rather than a help, to our reception of the Gospel. They deserve some credit for their candour and consistency; and if it were not for such utterances as these, the popular credulity would never be shaken. When, however, one more energetic than the rest follows out the principles of his party to their legitimate consequence, then the people have their eyes opened to a simple question, on which they are quite competent to pronounce an opinion. I am, therefore, under some considerable obligation to the speaker of that remarkable sentence, in which he deliberately prefers religion to morality, as he makes it all the easier for me to carry on the delightful work of drawing you on, step by step, to think out for yourselves a true faith, and to shake off irrational and ill-founded beliefs and opinions. We must, however, first try to get a clear notion of what we are talking about, before we can derive any benefit from the discussion of this unwise maxim,—“Religion without Morality is better than Morality without Religion.”

What do the words “religion and morality” here mean? There is no doubt about the meaning of “morality.” We all mean by it “Doing what is right to our fellow-men;” “Loving our neighbour as ourselves;” “Doing as we would be done by.” Both the speaker and ourselves agree in calling this “morality.” But I am sure we do not

agree with him as to the meaning of the word "religion;" simply because he contrasts in this sentence the one with the other. He draws a distinction and makes a choice between religion and morality; whereas you, if you have followed my teaching for three years, as I believe you have done, would never have dreamt of separating religion from morality, nor morality from religion. Your idea of true religion is, if I mistake not, true obedience to God's laws; and true obedience to God's laws is to do what is right, to love your neighbour as yourself. You believe that no amount of doctrinal belief, of lip service, or even of long and earnest prayers and praises to God, will do instead of our being good; or would at all please God, if we were not, at the same time, working righteousness in our daily lives. So with us, true religion and morality must go together—must be so intimately bound together as to be one and the same. Our religion is our duty, and our duty is our religion. We know of nothing which God demands of us as religious duty which is not part and parcel of moral duty. If I made any distinction between them it would be this:—Religion is morality with a conscious reference to God's authority over us, or with a sense of His interest in our well-doing. You see, then, when a Church dignitary talks of religion and morality as if they could be separated, as if one could exist without the other, he cannot

mean by the word "religion" what *we* mean by it. His idea of religion cannot be the same as ours, or else he would never have thought of such a thing as religion without morality, or morality without religion.

Now, as he is not here to answer for himself the question, "What do you mean by religion as separate from morality?" the only fair way of proceeding is to suppose an answer, and to remember all through that we are only supposing it. We can only be certain of one thing, that he did not mean by religion what we mean by it. That is clear. Beyond this we can only guess. But, my friends, if you will trust me, I will do my best to tell you what the speaker meant by the word "religion." I am unhappily more familiar with clerical notions than you are, and have dim recollections of having once thought and spoken as they do now.

From the whole tenor of the speech referred to, the speaker meant by "religion" a "belief in the articles of the Christian Faith." I do not think, as some have suggested, that he meant *any* religious belief without morality to be better than morality without *any* religious belief; but, especially and definitely, that the maintenance of Christian dogmas, such, for example, as the dogmas of the Incarnation and Atonement, the assertion of the Crucifixion, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and the dogmas

about the Holy Ghost, the Church, and the forgiveness of sins—that the maintenance of all these without morality was better than morality without this religious belief. Incredible as it seems to you that any minister of Christ should have so far forgotten, or remained ignorant, of the Master's own religious belief and religious morality, it is nevertheless true that hundreds of clergymen, and some few laymen, whom they have misled, actually prefer the maintenance of these dogmas to every other cause in the universe. Indeed, as I told you, the Evangelical, seeing that integrity of life renders the mind incapable of being enslaved by his fearful doctrines, frankly owns that a good life is a hindrance to the reception of what he calls the Gospel. It is indeed a hindrance, thank God! and if you want to be free from credulity and superstition, begin betimes to “amend your lives, and live in charity with all men.” “So shall you be meet partakers” of that rich banquet of truth, which God has spread for all upright souls. So surely as you carelessly launch yourselves into the waves of sin and selfishness, you will have to take refuge, if you ever get to land at all, on some far distant foreign shore, terribly unlike your own home and your native land.

Now, if the meaning of the speaker be, that a belief in the articles of the Christian Creed without morality is better than morality without this belief, I put it to you very simply, Do

you think so? I frankly own that, though I am a Churchman, I should much rather see them put aside and torn up as rubbish, than to see the cause of morality, which is true religion, for a moment imperilled. I would honestly prefer a morality without any religious belief—nay, even without any religious hopes and religious consolations—than the most comforting, satisfying creed without morality. I will not judge other men—not even by their foolish words—but I will say that God has taught me, or I believe He has taught me, that the highest and noblest thing to which we can aspire, is *to be righteous—to do what is right—to live and walk in love*; that this is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of all true religion, and that if any religion were found unfavourable to this personal righteousness, this divine morality, it must be a false religion and not a true one; that if any religion could be substituted for morality, so as to make its professors sit down contentedly without making moral effort, satisfied and even happy, while they are still unrighteous, and morally no better for their religion, that religion, whether spoken by men or angels, consecrated or not with the testimony of ten thousand miracles, would be a curse instead of a blessing; and what is more, could have no abiding roots in a world where God has placed the sons of men. For men will be true to the nature which



God has given them, and must learn, whether they will or not, every lesson which their bitter experience forces upon them, with regard to the sovereign importance of righteous dealing.

It is from statements like the one which we are considering, that the gravest attacks are made upon existing religious beliefs. The reverend speaker little knew that those few words of his would awaken enquiry, thought, and scepticism which no after apologies can allay. Common men and women like you and me, dear friends, who have our daily work to do, our many self-denying duties to fulfil, our own rough or sour tempers to control, our homes to guard and our dear ones to cherish and to help—who know how hard the battle between the flesh and the spirit really is—who yearn after eternity, not for its rest and its joy, but for its divine promise of perfect righteousness—when we hear an advocate of modern Christianity talk in these, to us, pagan—nay, worse than pagan—Pharisaical riddles, we feel inclined to retort—“Keep your religion and leave us our morality. Comfort your hearts with incessant religious rites, and stimulate your imaginations with contemplation of wonders which tax human credulity without healing human wounds, which stimulate your fevered selfishness, and narrow up the channels of the love of God; and leave us to ourselves, and to our unaided, unseen struggle in the darkness of our own hearts.

We would rather thus fight against our daily besetting sins, from simple sense of duty, or regard for fellow-men, even should we have to do so without a ray of hope from above, than give up our march onwards, over the stones and briars of life, to stop playing with you by the wayside, while you are mimicking the grand rites of Ancient Sacrifice,\* and thinking to please your Maker, or some of His subordinate deities, by your empty and dreary conjuring!

“Take your religion, with its mystifications and its impossibilities, and leave us to our excommunicated morality, and to the uncovenanted mercies of God!”

Truth must be spoken. Though God forbid it should ever be said of us, it is certain that some have been driven by these foolish priests into downright Atheism. And an Atheist, you know, is one who does not believe in the existence of God at all. Inexpressibly sad as it is to us, who rejoice in our Maker, and whose hearts pant for the Living God, yet there are some who cannot believe in Him at all. Some of these are kept stedfast in duty, pure and upright in their lives, models of good fathers and mothers, good husbands and wives, and fulfilling God's own law of love, which in mercy He has not made dependent on Creed,

\* See Letter, signed C.C., on St. Alban's Church, Holborn, in the *Times*, October 19th, 1866, and the article thereon.

but has engraven on our very hearts. They are living evidences of morality without a religion; and if I had to choose between the lot of the righteous man who could not believe in a God, and the man of unlimited credulity, who cared not to be righteous so much as to be a believer, I would infinitely sooner be the righteous Atheist. Simply and solely from love of God I would thus choose. Because I believe that God would be more pleased with any one for doing his duty to his fellow-men, than for being merely occupied with making prayers, and singing psalms, and filling the mind with all sorts of profitless imaginations respecting the unseen. Even, as a poor selfish father, if I must choose, I would rather my children behaved well to each other, and to their mother, than to me. And I would much prefer their doing this, to their coming to me all day long, and making petitions, and saying over the same words of praise to me.

But, never fear, there is no need of our having such an alternative set before us. God will not—at least, so we hope and believe,—God will not require us to choose between a religion without morality, and a morality without religion. To “love our neighbour as ourselves” is to render the best homage of our lives to our adorable Maker, who has written this as His law upon our hearts.

“To *do* righteousness is to *be* righteous even as Christ was righteous.” These are not my words, but St. John’s. “Let no man deceive you.” Be

not put off with the enticing parade of religious ceremonies, or the long list of religious dogmas and religious miracles, to abandon your devotion to God in the more difficult, but more honourable conflicts of daily life. If religious belief, and the cause of morality, should ever come into open collision, I know well which *must* give way. A Creed crowned with the victories of twice two thousand years cannot stand a day when brought into open contrast with the Eternal Law of God, the Law of Love, which man's deepest heart yearns to fulfil.

Priests may howl at you, "*He that believeth not shall be damned,*" but you may cheerfully and kindly reply, "*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love our brethren.*"