

**RELIGIOUS STUDIES FOR
LAYMEN: STUDIES
IN THEOLOGY, FIRST
SERIES, PP. 8-137**

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Religious Studies for Laymen: Studies in Theology, First Series, pp. 8-137 by Charles Elmer Beals

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STUDIES IN THEOLOGY

BY

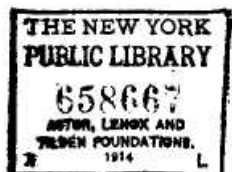
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PREFACE

Three things are attempted in the present revision of the *First Series of Studies in Theology*. First of all the arrangement of the chapters has been changed. The purpose has been to secure, if possible, a more consistent order in the presentation of subjects. It has been difficult to do this because each lecture was first given entirely independent of the others, and therefore had no necessary logical connection with them. The purpose only was to consider related lines of thought in order to secure a point of view from which to take up later some of the problems suggested thereby. The present attempt to secure a logical order can be but imperfect for the reason that no such order originally existed.

In the next place, there has been a careful revision of the text itself. The main criticism passed upon the earlier work, so far as I can judge, has been that the language used was too much that of the text-book and class room. I have defended the use of some technical terms on the ground that if a real educational advance is to be made, the words most frequently used nowadays in Science and Theology should become a part of the layman's vocabulary. I have come to appreciate more than ever the difficulties under which we labor in attempting to translate abstract theological questions into the form of everyday thought. However, if these questions are stated in a concrete way, it does not seem to me the task is impossible. In the present attempt to do this I have deliberately used many illustrations which did not appear in the original lectures. It is hoped that the liberal use of illustrations will enable the reader to grasp more easily the points of view here presented.

Finally, I have prepared a number of *Questions for Study*. These are to be used in connection with preparation for the weekly lesson. The answers to most of these questions may be found in the text; but a few others are added which will require original thought.

PREFACE

It is hoped individual thought will be quickened throughout the study, and that the members of the class will secure thereby a point of view from which later to consider more difficult problems. By the proper use of the questions, the lectures will be more available for study in adult classes where these text-books may be adopted.

C. E. B.

Brandon, Vt., January, 1913.

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The impressions men have received of the outer world lead them to look from nature to a God of nature.

II. THEORIES AS TO THE METHOD OF CREATION.—It is important to distinguish between the fact of creation and the method of it. Formerly it was held that religion furnished us with all the necessary information as to how the world was created; but now it is increasingly seen religious, the question of method is wholly a scientific problem.

1. *Theories as to the Origin of Matter.*—There are two possible views as to the origin of matter. The first is that matter was made out of nothing. There was a time when matter did not exist. It has been claimed God need not have created the world, and when he did so, he might have made a different kind of a world had he so decided. However, such a created world would have no necessary connection with previous forms of existence. It would be something entirely new, not being formed from any previously existing thing. God would create it and set it to run its course much as a man would make a clock. When there was need of it, God might suspend a natural law or perform a miracle. Otherwise such a physical world must run its course until it ran down and the whole created physical universe became a cold lifeless mass. The difficulty with this view is that it places God too far from the world. If a world could suddenly be created from nothing once, it might be done again. Such a thing is unthinkable, for the very term "Universe" implies there can be nothing outside of it. There is one thing God cannot do. He cannot create a world independent of himself. The process of creation must be a movement within God. There must be a sufficient reason why the creation exists. Therefore, we cannot think of it as created out of nothing.

The second view is that matter is eternal. Every physical event has a preceding physical cause. There is a

cause for the exact position of every star and every grain of sand. All physical changes are but passing aspects of one constant physical energy. Matter as we know it exists in three forms; these are solid, liquid, and vapor. However, differences in form are not absolute. Iron can be heated until it becomes a fluid. Air can be compressed until it becomes a solid. Matter changes only its form, while the amount of physical energy in the universe remains forever the same. Now if this eternal Energy shows itself in no other way than through the physical creation, matter can never be destroyed.

However, there are some who argue that as matter can change its form, as for instance from solid to liquid, so matter itself is but a temporary form of an eternal Energy which is not essentially physical. This view avoids the error of supposing matter was made out of nothing; but probably will not commend itself to science. This is really a question as to whether what we call Energy exhausts itself in what we call matter. If it does matter is eternal; if not, matter is but one phase, and perhaps a temporary phase, of the ultimate Energy.

2. *The Theory of Special Creation.*—The first chapters of Genesis describe the appearance of different orders of created things on successive creative days. The question arises whether these 'days of creation' were short or long periods of time, and whether in the process of creation each order of things appeared suddenly, independently, and fully matured, or arose through a gradual process of development. The theory of special creation holds that each thing was created separately by a direct special creative act. According to this view, God created all things according to type, forever unchangeable and incapable of any further development beyond that involved in the perpetuation of the species. After God had thus created all things, the work of creation ceased.

3. *The Theory of Evolution.*—What is known as the theory of evolution is advanced by modern science to explain the method of creation. The term is usually applied to the development of life; yet in a broader sense the whole physical world is in process of evolution. Astronomers believe there was a time when our world was a hot molten mass of material drawn together by gravitation. As this mass gradually cooled, an atmosphere was formed, rains began to fall, and land appeared. In due time, when the climate had become stable, life appeared. Thus the world is running its course. Other planets have gone through similar evolutions already, and now are cold and lifeless. So will our earth run its course, for all the physical world is in process of change.

The theory of evolution applies especially to the development of life. There are three theories as to the origin of life: there was life in the original matter of which the earth was made; life was brought here from some other planet; living matter originated spontaneously from the non-living. The first two are inconceivable. The third, while not impossible, reduces life to physical and chemical processes. We cannot ignore any physical aspects or possibilities in accounting for the origin of life, but after all we must confess we cannot lift that veil. The theory of evolution accepts as its working principle the belief that all forms of life are related. From an original simple form through long processes of evolution the present complexity has resulted. Thus creation has been a slow process of development, and it has not yet ceased.

III. THE PROOF OF EVOLUTION.—The ancient Greeks believed in evolution as the method of creation. The idea was also accepted by early Churchmen and by the philosophers of the Middle Ages. The theory is now the basis of modern science, and is increasingly accepted everywhere. The proof of evolution is a scientific question.