

**DISCOURSES ON THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION:  
ADDRESSES TO DOUBTERS  
WHO WISH TO BELIEVE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649351480

Discourses on the Philosophy of Religion: Addresses to Doubters who Wish to believe by  
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**GEORGE RIPLEY**

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## P R E F A C E .

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THE following discourses are not published by way of controversy. Their only aim is the quickening of a pure faith in spiritual truth, by a calm exposition of some of the principles on which it rests. They were written, and preached, nearly two years since, to the people of my pastoral charge. One of them has already been given to the public,\* but I think it right to introduce it here as an integral part of the whole series.

It is certain that any discourses, prepared in the usual course of professional labor, without the remotest view to publication, are likely to be found unworthy of a wider sphere. I am sensible that these discourses can claim little merit, except that of containing the distinct expression of ideas, which seem to me of vital importance to the welfare of man. They are set forth in so many ways by more skilful hands than mine, that I should be ashamed of the sight of them in print, did I not feel called upon by a strong sense of duty to reveal my whole mind to those who are already in possession of one side of my faith. I have been thought by some esteemed friends to have exhibited views in a recent number of one of our theological journals† that are liable to many serious objections. I fear also that I may have unconsciously given pain to some devout and timid minds, who think that discussions of this nature serve only to unsettle the foundations of Christian faith. I have the most heartfelt

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\* Discourse V. *Liberal Preacher*, Nov. 1835.

† *Christian Examiner* for Nov. 1836. *Review of Martineau's Lectures.*

sympathy with such minds. I would sooner never speak again than do aught which tends to cloud the blessed light of a serene and confiding piety. It was my purpose, in the discussion alluded to, to suggest a mode of considering the evidences of Christianity which should free it from certain difficulties under which it has been thought to labor. No one who has read my article understandingly can suppose that I intended to cast any doubt on the reality of the Christian miracles—or that I doubted them myself. I do not. Their certainty being once established, by what I deem the only valid proof, they are no less holy and precious to me than to others.

The fears which are entertained by many, who are not theologians by profession, with regard to the effect of free discussion, often arises from the want of an intelligent and vigorous faith. They dread lest the progress of inquiry should bring to light some hidden defect in the grounds of our religion. They are, in fact, doubters, though they know it not. They wish to believe. They cannot bear to hear a word said which implies that any cherished view is wrong. But this arises from a lurking suspicion that there is something unsound in the fabric of their faith. To such minds these discourses are addressed. I would frankly point out to them the principles on which my own faith is built; and I cannot but hope that theirs will gain strength by the exposition. The interests of speculative science and of practical piety appear to me so intimately blended, that it would cause me deep sorrow to think that I had laid a rude hand on either. What I have recently published explains the negative side of my faith. I here give the positive; and one should read both the statements in connexion, in order to perceive the complete whole in which I venture to think my views exist in my own mind.

These pages do not claim to exhibit any thing new. I would watch for light from every quarter; and I can hardly suppose that my eyes are open to any rays which have not fallen on many others also. Resemblances may be detected between some of the views here advanced and those which are maintained by far abler pens. They are not intentional, but are traceable to the unconscious influence

that is always exerted on a seeking mind by master spirits, which it looks up to and reverences.

I ought to ask pardon for some repetitions of thought and expression. Perhaps they are not more, however, than were to be expected in compositions prepared at intervals of several weeks, by one whose mind was possessed with a few predominant ideas. Besides, it was my purpose to present the same course of argument in two or three different applications. The attentive reader, I trust, will discover that "uniformity of thought and design which will always be found in the writings of the same person when he writes with simplicity and in earnest."\*

Boston, November 18, 1836.

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\* Bishop Butler's Preface to his Sermons.





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**"Wisdom is the brightness of the Everlasting Light, the unspotted mirror of the Power of God and the image of his Goodness. And being but one she can do all things; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God and prophets."**

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# DISCOURSE I.

ON FAITH IN THE INVISIBLE.

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HEBREWS XI. 27.

"FOR HE ENDURED, AS SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE."

THESE words are applied by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to the ancient lawgiver of their nation, as descriptive of the principle of faith which formed a prominent element in his character. They may be regarded as describing with no less justice and force the peculiar character of every truly religious man. For there is nothing which more strongly marks the believer in religious truth, than his firm conviction of the reality of a vast range of subjects, which do not come under the cognizance of any of the senses. His thoughts are not confined to the contemplation of facts, which are presented to the notice of the outward eye. His mind is not limited to the gross and material objects, with which he is now surrounded, but passing over the boundaries of space and time, is conversant with truths, which bear the stamp of Infinity and Eternity. He is conscious of an inward nature, which is the source of more important and comprehensive ideas, than any which the external senses suggest, and he follows the decision of these ideas as the inspir-