

**MANUALS OF FAITH
AND DUTY, NO. I; THE
FATHERHOOD OF GOD**

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Manuals of Faith and Duty, No. I; The Fatherhood of God by John Coleman Adams

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JOHN COLEMAN ADAMS

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Manuals of Faith and Duty.

No. I.

THE
FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

BY

REV. JOHN COLEMAN ADAMS, D.D.

"OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN."

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The best name by which we can think of God is Father. It is a loving, sweet, heart-touching name; for the name of Father is, in its nature, full of inborn sweetness and comfort.

MARTIN LUTHER.

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD.

“THE fatherly relation and purpose of God toward men,” said Thomas Erskine, “is the fundamental revelation of Christianity.” In that sentence, the spiritually-minded Scot announced the growing faith of his own day and of ours. This great fact of the Divine economy is the corner-stone of the Christian system. It was the end and aim of the unfolding revelation which God made to the nation to whom He committed the truth concerning His nature and His disposition. It is a truth which was perceived with a growing clearness as the work of revelation proceeded; and the inspiring idea in the mind of Him in whom that work culminated, is the fatherhood of God and man's sonship to Him. All the truths which Jesus Christ gave to man have their root in this fundamental truth; all the Saviour's teaching rests at last upon this

conception of God. And every fact of Christ's dealings with men is tinged with a reflection caught from the brightness of this radiant verity of the spiritual universe.

I. — RELATION OF THE DOCTRINE TO REVELATION.

In saying that the truth of the Divine fatherhood was gradually made known to men, we but follow the teaching which the most distinguished and trustworthy defenders of the faith assert. The course of revelation was progressive. There is a steady advance in the announcement of Divine truth, from the earliest statements of the law, down to the universal principles made known by Jesus Christ. As Dr. George P. Fisher says: "It is plain that the religious consciousness, or the general type of religious ideas and feelings, rises higher and higher as we pass from one epoch to another of Hebrew history. Only by degrees did that which was latent in the relation assumed by God toward men, come to the light. . . . That Christianity is a higher stage in the process of revelation, the New Testament leaves us no room for doubt."¹ Or as Canon Row says:

¹ *Beginnings of Christianity*, pp. 7, 9.

“Christianity . . . is a plant which has grown in a succession of gradual stages until its culmination in Jesus Christ.”¹ Hence we shall not look for the same clear grasp of the fact in the minds of the Old Testament writers that we shall find in the souls of those on whom inspiration had fallen in later days. Nevertheless, the Old Testament does certainly contain assertions of the nature of God’s relation to man and man’s relation to God, which serve as the lower courses in the rising structure of revealed truth, uncontradicted by later disclosures.

II. — THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.

This fact gives great significance to the passages in the Old Testament which touch upon this relation of the Creator to humanity. The record of the creation is couched in the phrase which colors all Christian thought. “Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness. . . . So God created man in His own image.”² In what this likeness or image consists, we may discuss farther on; but it is to be noted at this point that the illumination

¹ Bampton Lectures, 1877, p. 3.

² Genesis i. 26, 27.