

THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPELS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649719891

The Theology of the Gospels by James Moffatt

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JAMES MOFFATT

**THE THEOLOGY
OF THE GOSPELS**

THE THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPELS

BY

JAMES MOFFATT, D.D., D.LITT.

VATES PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT GREEK AND EXEGESIS
MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD



LONDON: DUCKWORTH & CO.

3 HENRIETTA ST., COVENT GARDEN

1912

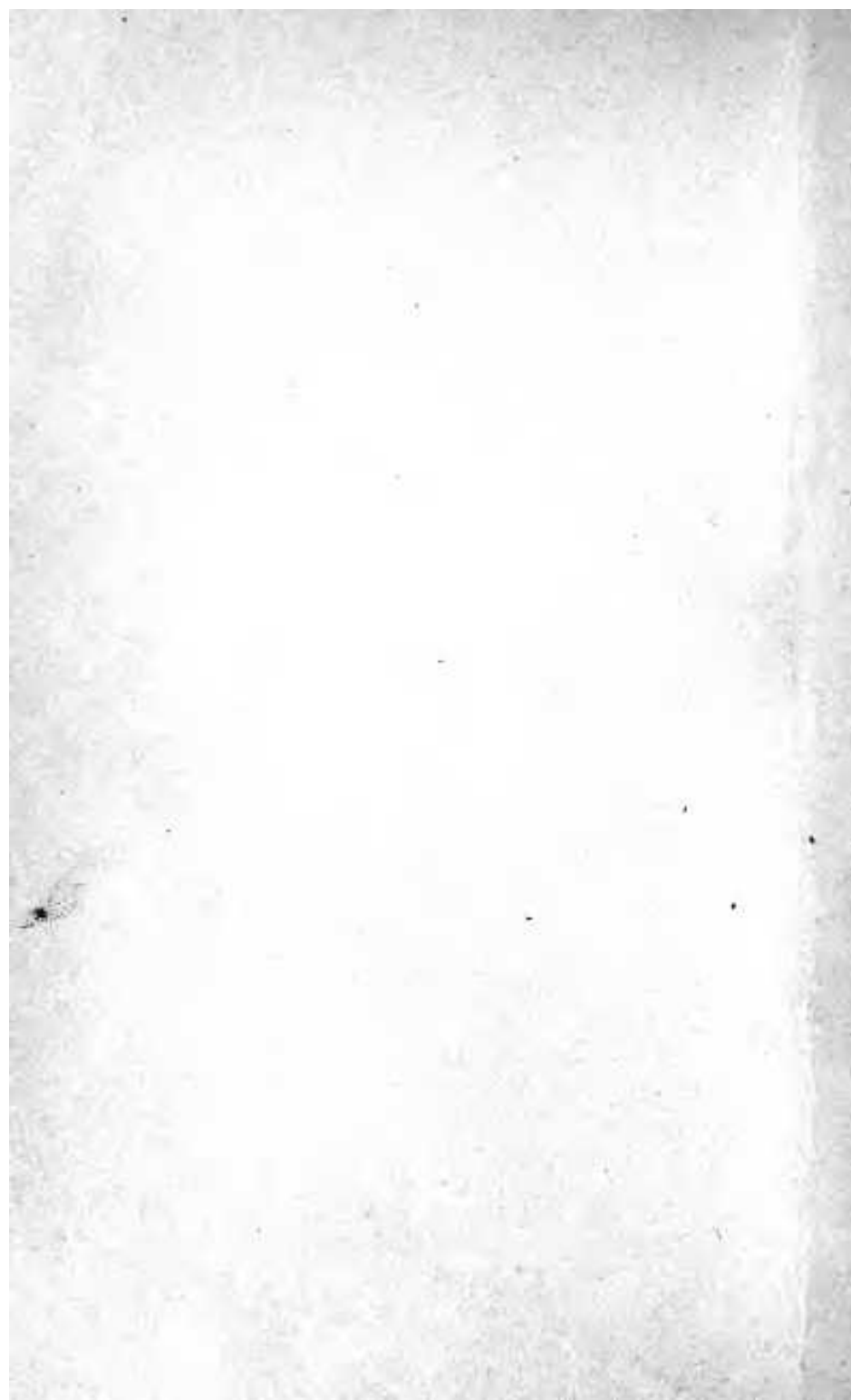
BS 2555
M6

All rights reserved

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

TO
MY COLLEAGUES IN MANSFIELD

259939



PREFACE

THE bulk of the following pages formed the substance of a course of lectures which I had the honour of delivering under the Alexander Robertson Trust in the University of Glasgow, during January and February of this year. In working over the materials afresh for the purpose of publication I have made considerable additions to the argument at various points, but, even so, the volume is not a classified survey of the various theological and religious conceptions which may be found within the compass of the gospels. My aim has been different. What these pages attempt to do is to present a study of the central and salient features in the theology of the gospels, taking theology in its stricter rather than in its wider sense. The standpoint for estimating the characteristic position of the gospels in the development of primitive Christian reflection is determined by the message and personality of Jesus. The gospels voice the faith of Jesus Christ in different keys, but the theme of their fugue-like variations is never forgotten amid all their windings, and it ought to be dominant in any study of their symphonies. Angelology and almsgiving, for example, enter into the religious scope of the gospels, but such notes only sound in relation to the controlling theme which uses them in its larger chords.

When Paul spoke to the Athenians, he took his

text from an inscription on some local altar, *to an unknown god*. He began by assuring his audience that he could tell them what they were worshipping in devout ignorance, and tried in this way to get a hearing for the gospel of Jesus. According to a Greek bishop of the tenth century, who wrote a commentary on Acts, the inscription dated from a complaint of Pan that the Athenians had neglected to acknowledge him. Consequently, after winning a victory over the Persians with the help of Pan, they erected an altar to him, and in order to guard against any similar danger in other directions if they neglected a god who was unknown to them, 'they erected that altar with the inscription to *an unknown god*, meaning "in case there is some other god whom we do not know, be this erected by us in his honour, that he may be gracious to us though he is not worshipped by us owing to our ignorance."' It is not clear where Ecumenius got this story about the origin of the Athenian altar, but it supplies an apt setting for the argument of the apostle's address. Paul did not mean that Jesus was a divine being who was required to make their pantheon complete. His point was that the religion which he preached in the name of Jesus was one which left no such blank spaces in the universe, no tracts of experience where human life was exposed to unknown powers of life and death, over which the God of Jesus did not avail to exercise control. Unluckily he was interrupted before he could develop his argument, but his epistles show how he would probably have worked out the relations of the Christian God to the universe of men and things. Now this also is the motive which underlies the theology of the

gospels; as the tradition develops, even prior to the climax of the Fourth gospel, we can feel the instinctive desire to present Jesus as adequate to all the needs of the human soul, and to state His revelation in such a way as to cover the entire experience of believing men. The messianic categories naturally tended at first to make the range of this interest religious rather than cosmic,—if we may use an antithesis which is convenient but not accurate. So far as apocalyptic took account of the universe, it had a short and sharp solution. Yet even within the earlier phases of the synoptic theology it is possible to detect the implicit conviction that faith in Jesus Christ has cleared up the religious situation of men and made the world an intelligible unity. The genesis of this conviction lies in the faith of Jesus Himself. The interest of the gospels, in the aspect of their theological development, is the deepening appreciation of the significance which attaches to His personality; from one side and another they witness consciously and unconsciously to the belief that Jesus is Lord of all powers visible and invisible, and that to worship the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be freed for ever from that ignorance of the world which haunts men with a variety of superstitious fears.

It is in the light of this fundamental and characteristic motive that the theology of the gospels reveals its vital unity amid the variations which catch the eye upon the surface of their pages. The differences between them are little, compared to the difference between them and what followed or preceded them. Any text-book of the New Testa-