

# **BERGSON AND RELIGION**

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Bergson and Religion by Lucius Hopkins Miller

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**LUCIUS HOPKINS MILLER**

**BERGSON  
AND RELIGION**



OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST  
AN HISTORICAL APPROACH

BY

LUCIUS HOPKINS MILLER

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LUCIUS HOPKINS MILLER

Assistant Professor of Biblical Instruction in  
Princeton University



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## PREFACE

As the reader will quickly see, this is not primarily a book on philosophy, but a book on religion. Otherwise the writing of it should have been left to a philosopher, and that I do not pretend to be. Still, the ground covered lies between the two subjects (or, rather, overlaps both) and might therefore be considered open to occupancy by students of either subject. Theoretically, there is no reason why a philosopher's religious deductions should be any more reliable than the philosophical descriptions of a student of religion, for just as philosophy has its intricacies so religion also has its subtleties, and the subtleties of religion can be caught only through that insight which is bestowed by an intimate historical understanding. In this task the application of philosophical criteria may harm as well as help.

It is commonly thought, however, that the philosopher has more right in the field of religion than the student of religion has in the field of philosophy, and I must admit that,



judging by past performance, there is ground for this opinion. It is generally true that the philosopher is more at home in religion than the student of religion is in philosophy. I do not think that he should be, but he undoubtedly has been. However, I have noticed among philosophers the marked habit of carrying the metaphysical "big stick" wherewith to beat into subjection recalcitrant facts of religious history and psychology. This will not do, even though it is a natural tendency and very hard to avoid. Because it is so hard for the philosopher to resist this temptation, and because the student of the history of religion is likely to be more scientifically respectful in dealing with religious facts, there is much to be said for "a fair field and no favor" when a proposed discussion necessarily involves both subjects. I trust that in the philosophical parts of this study philosophers may not find the presentation inadequate or mistaken. I have at least tried, as best one may, to rid myself of prejudice and to present the facts exactly as they lie.

To obviate possible misunderstanding let me state definitely what my plan is. It is not

my aim to give a complete picture of Bergson's thought, nor is it my purpose to criticise his work. These things belong to philosophical specialists and they have been taken care of in adequate fashion. The religious effects of this important phase of recent thought have not been adequately dealt with hitherto, and this fact constitutes the *raison d'être* of the book. To discuss these effects satisfactorily I have been obliged to present, as briefly as clearness would permit, the outstanding emphases of Bergson's position. This, and this alone, is what I have tried to do in the philosophical portions of what follows.

The problem may be put thus: If Bergson's doctrine be completely accepted, what results for religion? The reader will soon discover that I sympathize with the teaching of Bergson at many points, both on philosophical and on religious grounds, but there are also elements in his system which I find difficult to accept. In other words, I am not a Bergsonian. But, among other things, I agree with Bergson in this, that the discovery of the whole truth of the universe is not the task of any one man. It requires the work of many men

and many minds to win those approximations to truth which are open to mortal beings. Nevertheless, Bergson has struck a vein, glistening and valuable, from which much pure and precious metal may be mined. This is particularly true for the student of religion and, through him, for religious leaders and the rank and file of the laity. At least this is my firm conviction, a conviction that has arisen and matured through a study of Bergson which was begun without any presuppositions, purely out of a general desire for information, and without any idea of writing a book. The thinking world is weary of negations. It is even more weary of dogmatic assertions. It must *know*, but it wishes also to *believe*. Bergson teaches us that we may believe without blinking the facts, and this, I take it, is the bottom-most yearning of the educated world today. I may add that Bergson is the outstanding literary exponent of those new, virile, constructive forces which are manifesting themselves so conspicuously in the bearing of France at the present moment. No one can fully understand the spiritual background of the present situation without knowing what Bergson and