

Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*

H[ugh] R[oss] Mackintosh. *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1927, pp. I-xv, 1-299.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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“Nothing less is required than a candid, courageous and well-informed effort to think out anew, in the light of modern knowledge, the foundation affirmations of our common Christianity.” (vii) [Is this not a clear statement of the liberal, accommodationist enterprise?]

“The authors [of this series, *The Library of Constructive Theology*]...desire to lay stress upon the value and validity of religious experience and to develop their theology on the basis of religious consciousness.” (viii) [I think the Reformers were very suspicious of basing anything on Christian experience. They preferred to work from the word. This current strategy owes much to John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872).]

PREFACE

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“The longer I live,” said Rainy, “the more important and wonderful does the forgiveness of sins seem to me.” (xi)

Note that, according to the title page, Mackintosh was Professor of Dogmatic Theology at New College, Edinburgh

I. INTRODUCTORY

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“Theology is simply a persistent and systematic effort to clarify the convictions by which Christians live.” (4)

(1) “The problem of Divine forgiveness has occasionally been put aside as perfectly unreal, as indeed a moral puzzle of our own making.” (7)

“The notion of forgiveness is only relevant to the alarmed or burdened conscience.” (7)

“Let the insensitive man take pains to see Jesus, let him not withdraw his attention from that Figure, and inevitably he will learn the truth about himself.” (9)

(2) “A second objection to forgiveness is the fear, or even the conviction, that men cannot be forgiven because the thing is contrary to the nature of the world.” (9)

“If then Christ is trustworthy, if there is a living God who loves and acts, the forgiveness of sins is the most stupendous, tragic and blessed possibility of life.” (13)

(3) “Finally, it may be argued that forgiveness is essentially immoral, and that consequently by its insistence on Divine pardon the Christian religion betrays a serious ethical inferiority to other, more sombre, faiths.” (13)

Paul “denied that God accepts us because we are good, but affirmed that the terms on which He accepts us ensure our becoming good.” (14)

“Christianity conquered through its message that in Jesus there is personally present a God Who receives sinners.” (21)

II. WHAT FORGIVENESS IS

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“The fundamental and creative act whereby salvation in this sense is made and kept real, is the forgiveness of sins.” (23)

“If God did not chastise sin in the very act of forgiveness, and in the persons of the forgiven as a sequel to forgiving them, He would not be more loving than He is; He would cease to be God.” (25)

“Those people who say that they can forgive but not forget betray the fact, unconsciously for the most part, that their ‘forgiveness’ has been accompanied by reservations and qualifications which, morally, are fatal.” (29)

III. SIN AND GUILT

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Mackintosh begins with the assertion that we cannot know what forgiveness is if we do not know what sin is. [Note that this is exactly opposite of what Barth says.]

“The chief end of man, in the Christian view, is to turn into conscious and willed obedience, throughout all the powers of his being, that absolute dependence upon God by which he lives.” (51) [Does this come from Schleiermacher? It seems to be in direct contradiction to the Westminster Confession of Faith.]

“Sin, essentially, is selfish failure to trust and obey God.” (54)

“Had sin been mere ignorance, enlightenment would have sufficed.” (58)

“Sin then is the claim, explicit or implicit, to live independently of God and to put something, whether self or world, in His place.” (60)

IV. FORGIVENESS PRESENT IN JESUS

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“The only people in the world to-day who live in the glad consciousness that their sins have been forgiven are those who have encountered Jesus.” (82)

“In His view it is inconceivable that the pardoned should not begin to love. Where love is absent, there has been no reception of forgiveness.” (94)

“The Bearer of forgiveness perishes in giving complete expression to the mercy and judgment which in their unity constitute the pardon of God.” (99)

V. ST. PAUL AND JUSTIFICATION

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“The core of justification is this, that salvation begins wholly on God’s side, that it begins with an exhibition in Jesus of God’s love to the sinful which man has done and can do nothing to merit, and that the assurance of forgiveness is ‘not the goal to be reached by our own efforts, but the only point from which any human effort can start.’” (104)

“The cross is the prevenient act of God’s love; it is a deed done irrespective of all man’s doing.” (111)

“As missionary, too, there was on primary thing he [Paul] had to do—and every preacher finds he has to do it still—viz. clear the ground of the last vestige of the belief that salvation comes as a result of moral excellence, of noble character, and replace this by the revolutionary certainty that character comes rather from the trustful acceptance of God’s love.” (114)

“Faith itself, St. Paul would rejoin, is itself the gift of God, and can furnish no occasion for boasting.” (118)

“The only really good man is the pardoned man, and he is good because he alone has been delivered from the self-centeredness which underlies all moral failure, and is henceforward content to owe everything to God.” (119)

VI. LUTHER AND THE GOSPEL

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(1) "In the patristic age, the great New Testament idea of justification of faith, although not denied outright, was very imperfectly understood." (126)

(2) "Among the cardinal factors in Roman Catholic thought with which the Reformers came into violent collision is that of merit as a religious concept." (132)

(1) "It is foreign to the New Testament." (138)

(2) "...the concept in question is now virtually absent from the best work in that field." (138-9)

(3) "The idea of merit belongs not to our higher experience but to the level of our everyday legal and semi-moral notions." (139-40)

(4) "In any case, we imperfect men can possess no merit before God." (141)

(5) "The evangelical view of faith (*fiducia*) keeps the mind at a level at which the thought of merit becomes unmeaning and even repulsive." (142)

(3) "We have seen that ability to win merit derives, on the usual Catholic view, from infused and supernatural grace." (143)

"Thus to the Reformers grace, which is God's love flowing down to the unworthy, excludes all merit and displaces the order of precisely adjusted rewards by an order in which forgiving mercy reigns." (145)

"What Luther, Calvin and Zwingli did, as guides of the new movement, was to set forth in Scriptural and experimental [experiential] terms, as well as weave into creeds, a simple evangelical faith." (152)

(1) "Justification at bottom is deliverance from guilt; it is forgiveness." (152)

(2) "Justification confronts us as objective, for it is the act or pronouncement of God;...it is also an experience of man." (153)

(3) "Justification, far from being a passing act of God, ushers the sinner into a new, permanent relation to the Father." (153)

VII. THE DIVINE REACTION AGAINST SIN

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“He would not be more Divine if He dealt with sin as a trifle, merely letting the sinner off; He would cease to be God.” (158)

“Lack of indignation at wickedness is a sign, not of a poor nature only, but of positive unlikeness to Jesus Christ.” (162)

“Punishment, in short, is a part of kindness in dealing with immature or undisciplined characters (which we all of us are).” (165)

“The sorest punishment of sin lies in the sinner’s isolation from God. To sin and to break fellowship are one thing.... This loss of a living connexion with God is *par excellence* the punishment of sin.” (168)

VIII. THE PARDONING GOD

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(1) “The forgiven man is acutely conscious of the personality of God.” (175, emphasis added)

(2) “He who pardons is intuitively known as—to use the great Biblical phrase—the living God.” (177)

“By His mercy men do *not* invariably reap all they have sown.” (182) [That is to say, not only that forgiveness is real, but also that it is miraculous.]

(3) “His very nature is sacrificial love.” (185, emphasis added)

“To us pardon is free because for Him its realisation came through agony.” (189)

“The forgiveness of God rises up through the depths of a self-abandoning passion that sinners can never fathom.” (190)

IX. THE ATONEMENT

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“Argument concerning reconciliation, if it is to lead anywhere, must move within the field of Christian experience. Only there do the wheels, as we say, bite the rails.... Anselm begins his great work by professing to put the actual Christ aside (as if He had never been).... It cannot be too emphatically said that this is hopeless.” (194-5)

(1) “In Jesus’ death, we behold the absolute judgment and condemnation of sin.” (198)

(a) “Sin is condemned in the cross because it there is permitted fully to expose its true nature.” (198)

(b) “Sin is judged in the cross by Jesus’ attitude to its intrinsic evil.” (199)

© “Sin is judged in the cross of Jesus because the connexion between sin and suffering is there made utterly clear.” (202)

(2) “In Jesus’ death we behold the absolute disclosure of Divine love to the sinful.” (206)

X. THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING FORGIVEN

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“There is but one way out: we are undone except as there is made good to us the utterly free forgiveness of God. And the state or attitude of thought, feeling and will in which we receive this inestimable gift is that which can be designated by the two great words, Repentance and Faith.” (232)

“Repentance (to take it first), like every religious act, concerns the three cardinal modes of being conscious—knowing, feeling, willing. Sin is recognised, it is disliked, it is disowned.” (234)

“Faith, for the mind of the New Testament, is the act in which the fundamentally right relation to God is actualised. Personal trust makes the trusting man righteous in God’s sight; it is the attitude—in fact, the only attitude—which contents the Father’s heart.” (241)

An Augustinian or Calvinist doctrine of predestination takes away assurance. (247-8)
[Mackintosh is going up against two great theologians here! They would say that predestination is the basis of assurance.]

“The reality of our communion with God in prayer will be its own evidence;” (250) [Was it Billy Graham who said, in the face of the God is dead theology, that he know God was alive, because he had spoken to him that morning?]

XI. THE MORAL INSPIRATION OF FORGIVENESS

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Forgiveness removes the burden of guilt. (252)

“The supreme secret of goodness, which carries all else within itself, is of course the new fellowship with God on which the pardoned man has entered.” (255)

XII. FORGIVENESS AND THE CHURCH

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“Apart from the Church, the communion of believing men, forgiveness is devoid of meaning.” (271)

“Apart from the forgiven life of the Church, the company of the faithful, pardon for the guilty could be nothing more than a bleached and empty phrase.” (276)

CONCLUSION

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“Jesus Christ has done many things for the world; the chief thing He has done is to mediate the forgiveness of sins and to impart the assurance of its reality.” (287)

[See this Conclusion for an excellent, four page summary of the argument of the whole!]

“Forgiveness is central to Christianity; it is a truth, an ingredient, without which the faith created by Jesus would lose its identity.” (287)

“Nothing less than the Cross could have persuaded men that God *does* blot out their sin.” (290)

“Yet the wonder of forgiveness is the measure of its necessity. And the deep, personal certitude that there is forgiveness with God is the true spring and cause of all evangelism. In every age the guilty must be told of the remission of sins—it must be brought close to them by self-abnegating friendship—if their life is to be commensurate with the Divine thought of reconciliation. ‘With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption.’—this is the note of authentic Christianity. And it is a note which men love to hear in a preacher’s voice.” (290)

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