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Preached Before the University of Oxford

Henry Longueville Mansel

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The Bampton lectures at Oxford, founded by the bequest of John Bampton in order to examine ideas from Christian theology, have taken place regularly since 1780. In 1858 the philosopher Henry Longueville Mansel delivered the set of eight lectures reissued in this volume. Mansel expresses the view - influenced by Kant and Hamilton - that the human mind is 'conditioned', and that human knowledge is strictly limited to the finite. Humans cannot attain any positive conception of the nature of the 'Absolute and Infinite Being' with certainty. We only have an imperfect representation of God and the divine through their analogy to finite things. And yet, God exists. Mansel asserts that God cannot be understood by reason but should be accepted by faith. His book ignited a bitter controversy with the Christian socialist theologian Frederick Maurice, and remains of interest to historians of philosophy and theology to this day.

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THE
LIMITS OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT
EXAMINED
IN EIGHT LECTURES,
PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, IN
THE YEAR M.DCCC.LVIII.

ON THE FOUNDATION OF
THE LATE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.,
CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY HENRY LONGUEVILLE MANSEL, B.D.,
READER IN MORAL AND METAPHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY AT MAGDALEN COLLEGE;
TUTOR AND LATE FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE;
NOW REGIUS PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY,
AND CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

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THE OBJECTIONS MADE TO FAITH ARE BY NO MEANS AN EFFECT OF
KNOWLEDGE, BUT PROCEED RATHER FROM AN IGNORANCE OF
WHAT KNOWLEDGE IS.

BISHOP BERKELEY.

NO DIFFICULTY EMERGES IN THEOLOGY, WHICH HAD NOT PREVIOUSLY
EMERGED IN PHILOSOPHY.

SIR W. HAMILTON.

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EXTRACT
FROM
THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF THE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON,
CANON OF SALISBURY.

——“ I give and bequeath my Lands and Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold all and singular the said Lands or Estates upon trust, and to the intents and purposes hereinafter mentioned; that is to say, I will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford for the time being shall take and receive all the rents, issues, and profits thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations, and necessary deductions made) that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be established for ever in the said University, and to be performed in the manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the first Tuesday in Easter Term, a Lecturer be yearly chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by no others, in the room adjoining to the Printing-House, between the hours of ten in the morning and two in the afternoon, to preach eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year following, at St. Mary's in Oxford, between the commencement of the last month in Lent Term, and the end of the third week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint that the eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon either of the following subjects—to confirm and establish the Christian Faith, and to confute all heretics and schismatics—upon the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures—upon the authority of the writings of the primitive Fathers, as to the faith and practice of the primitive Church—upon the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Divinity of the Holy

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Ghost—upon the Articles of the Christian Faith, as comprehended in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

“Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always printed, within two months after they are preached, and one copy shall be given to the Chancellor of the University, and one copy to the Head of every College, and one copy to the Mayor of the City of Oxford, and one copy to be put into the Bodleian Library; and the expense of printing them shall be paid out of the revenue of the Land or Estates given for establishing the Divinity Lecture Sermons; and the Preacher shall not be paid, nor be entitled to the revenue before they are printed.

“Also I direct and appoint, that no person shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons, unless he hath taken the degree of Master of Arts at least, in one of the two Universities of Oxford or Cambridge; and that the same person shall never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons twice.”

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TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

THE third and fourth editions of these Lectures were accompanied by a Preface intended to meet some of the objections urged against the argument of the work by various critics. This Preface is now withdrawn, those portions of it which seemed worth retaining having been thrown into the form of additional notes to the several passages in the Lectures to which they relate. To the present edition it has been thought preferable to prefix a brief summary of the argument of the work as a whole, together with a list of authorities, ancient and modern, whose testimony may be cited in support of the principal doctrines maintained in the body of the work. The summary, though the necessity of it was first suggested by the misapprehensions of some critics concerning the purpose of the main argument, has been drawn up in general terms, without any special reference to such criticisms; its object being simply to assist towards a right apprehension of the argument, not to expose the misapprehensions of individuals. The list of authorities has no pretension to be considered as complete, or as the result of systematic search. It is simply a collection of passages which have come before the author in the general course of his reading, whether before or since the first publication of the Lectures; and, as regards the period subsequent to the Reformation, it is intentionally limited to writers in the communion of the Church of England.

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This list might, no doubt, be considerably enlarged by a more careful investigation, or by one extended over a wider area; but it is hoped that enough, at least, has been done to shew that a doctrine which has been vehemently condemned by some recent critics as an heretical novelty is not without sufficient vouchers in support both of its antiquity and of its Catholicity.

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It is assumed throughout the Lectures that human reason is capable of attaining to some conception of a Supreme Being, and that this conception will vary in intellectual elevation and moral purity according to the intellectual and moral condition of those by whom it is formed. This assumption is implied in the title, "The Limits of Religious Thought," which supposes the existence of a religious thought to be limited, and is expressly asserted in the Second Lecture, p. 30. The further question to be considered is this: Granting that such conceptions exist, in various degrees of approximation to the truth, what is the highest point of elevation to which human philosophy, apart from Revelation, can raise them; and what is the nature of the assistance afforded by Revelation when given? Are such conceptions, in their highest form, exact representations of the absolute nature of God, so that the theological conclusions to which they lead are entitled to be accepted as scientific certainties? or are they merely approximate representations, founded on analogy, not on exact resemblance, and leading to conclusions which, however reasonable as probabilities, and however valuable in the absence of more trustworthy information, are yet but one kind of probable evidence among many, whose exact value cannot be estimated till full account has been taken of all corroborative or conflicting evidences derivable from other sources? Under

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the former supposition, Reason is the paramount authority in all religious questions and the criterion by which any professed revelation must be tested; whether with the Dogmatist we maintain that Reason is in agreement with Revelation, and that the revealed doctrines are to be received because they can be demonstrated from rational premises, or with the Rationalist assert that Reason and Revelation are in some cases opposed to each other, and that in all such cases the revelation must at once be set aside as intrinsically incredible. Under the latter supposition, Reason, though by no means set aside as worthless, is reduced from a supreme to a coordinate authority: its conclusions must be compared with those derived from other sources; and we are at liberty, when Reason and Revelation come into apparent conflict, to admit at least the possibility that the former may be in error, and that the latter need not necessarily be rejected for conflicting with it.

In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to examine the constitution of the human mind, and the character of the conception of Divine things which the mind, under the conditions of that constitution, is capable of forming. The mental conditions which determine the character of a philosophy of religion must be the same with those which determine the character of philosophy in general; and the limits, if limits there are, of philosophy in general will be the limits of religious philosophy also.

There is a problem which philosophy in all ages has attempted to solve, and the solution of which is indispensable before the conclusions of philosophy can be accepted as scientific certainties and sure guides to religious belief. That problem is, to determine the nature of Absolute and Infinite Existence, and its relation to relative and finite existences. Such an inquiry is not necessarily an

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inquiry into the nature of God: it was prosecuted of old by Heathen philosophers without any necessary connection with their religious belief: it may be prosecuted now by the Pantheist or by the Atheist, no less than by the believer in a Personal God. But to a Christian, the two inquiries, though in themselves distinct, become necessarily combined into one. If we believe that God made the world, not by a necessary process from all eternity, but by a free act commencing in time, we must also believe that before that creation God existed alone, having no relation to any other being, and therefore as the One Absolute Being. In the words of Bishop Pearson, “Deus in se est ens absolutum, sine ulla relatione ad creaturas: fuit enim ab æterno sine ulla creatura, et potuit, si voluisset, in æternum sine creatura esse.”^a And if in this sense we believe in God as an Absolute Being, we must also believe in Him as an Infinite Being; for the conception of a finite being necessarily involves the possibility of something greater and more perfect than itself, which is incompatible with the idea of God. And finally, if we believe that God made the world, we must believe that, at some point of time, the one absolute and infinite Being gave existence to other relative and finite beings; we must believe that the God who is absolute in Himself is also a First Cause in relation to His creatures.

But when once it is conceded that the Absolute and Infinite Being must be identified with the Deity, two distinct conceptions come into contact and apparently into collision with each other. The God demanded by our moral and religious consciousness must be a *Person*. Does the Philosophy of the Absolute and Infinite lead us to the conclusion that the Being contemplated under those aspects is a Personal Being? and if not, must our belief in

^a *Minor Theological Works*, vol. i., p. 13, see below, p. xxxi.

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a personal God be abandoned in obedience to the dictates of such a philosophy? The first of these questions may be to a great extent answered by History. As a matter of fact, the hardest and most consistent reasoners who have attempted a philosophy of absolute existence—Parmenides, Plotinus, Spinoza, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel—have one and all attained to their conclusions by dropping out of their philosophy the attribute of personality, and exhibiting the absolute existence as an impersonal abstraction, or as an equally impersonal universe of all existence.^b Are we then bound to follow the philosophy of the Absolute to a conclusion utterly destructive of all religious relation between God and man? and if not, how are we to dispose of the claims of a philosophy, which, to whatever errors it may have led, has undoubtedly exercised a fascination over the most powerful intellects in various ages, and which, if it is to be met at all, must be met, not simply by the repudiation of certain conclusions, but by pointing out the error of the principles which lead to them?

This is the task attempted in the Second and Third of the following Lectures: the former of which endeavours to shew that the metaphysical conceptions of the Infinite and the Absolute, as postulated by the above philosophy, cannot be applied in thought to any concrete object regarded as the one absolute and infinite being, without involving us in apparent contradictions, and equally so, whether we assert the existence of such a being or deny it; while the latter endeavours to explain these apparent contradictions by shewing that they arise, not from any inherent impossibility in the object contemplated, but from certain conditions in the constitution of the mind contemplating

^b See below, Lecture II., *Notes* 17, 25, 26; Lecture III., *Notes* 7, 8, 20, 22.

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it—conditions which are necessary to all positive and consistent human thought, and the violation of which, in the attempt to conceive the unconditioned, leads not to thought, but to the negation of thought. The conclusions drawn from this portion of the inquiry are, first, that the limits of positive thought cannot be the limits of belief; that we are compelled by the constitution of our minds to believe in the existence of an absolute and infinite being, the existence of such a belief being proved even by the unsuccessful efforts made by philosophy to comprehend the nature of this being: and secondly, that the apparent contradictions in which philosophy is involved in the course of such efforts (contradictions, be it remembered, which, as regards past speculations, are simply matters of fact, which exist independently of any theory) furnish no valid argument against such a belief, because, in the first place, they are common to unbelief equally with belief, and, in the second place, they may be shewn to result, not from the legitimate use of reason within its proper province, but from the illegitimate attempt to extend it beyond that province. If, then, it can be shewn that our religious instincts and feelings necessarily require us to believe in a Personal God, we are not justified in rejecting that belief on account of any apparent difficulties raised by the Philosophy of the Unconditioned. We may *believe that* a Personal God exists: we may *believe that* He is also absolute and infinite as well as personal; though we are unable, under our present conditions of thought, to *conceive the manner in which* the attributes of absoluteness and infinity coexist with those which constitute personality.^c The conclusion thus arrived at may be literally

^c It should be observed, once for all, that the terms *conceive*, *conception*, &c., as they are employed in the following Lectures, always imply an apprehension of the *manner* in which certain attributes can coexist with each other, so as to form a whole or

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stated in the words of St. Chrysostom: "*That* God is everywhere, I know; and *that* He is wholly everywhere, I know; but the *how*, I know not: *that* He is without beginning, ungenerated and eternal, I know; but the *how*, I know not."

It has next to be shewn that, as a matter of fact, those elements in the human consciousness which form the basis of religion, and from which positive religious ideas are originally derived, require, as their indispensable complement, the belief in a Personal God. This is attempted in the Fourth Lecture, where it is maintained that the two fundamental feelings on which religious thought is based, the *Sense of Dependence* and the *Sense of Moral Obligation*, necessarily point to a Personal Being, who as a Free Agent can hear and answer prayer, and as a Moral Governor is the source and author of the moral law within us. These are the immediate and positive sources

complex notion. It is not sufficient for conception that we should understand the meaning of each separate term which the notion contains: we must also apprehend them as existing in a certain manner, possible in imagination if not in actual experience. In this sense of the term, the test of conceivability of a complex notion is the coexistence of the component ideas in a possible object of intuition, pure or empirical. This I have endeavoured to explain at greater length in my *Prolegomena Logica*, p. 23, *seqq.*, and in my *Metaphysics*, p. 204, *seqq.* It is similarly explained by Sir W. Hamilton, *Reid's Works*, p. 377. Thus when it is said that the nature of God as an absolute and infinite

being is inconceivable, it is not meant that the terms *absolute* and *infinite* have no meaning—as mere terms they are as intelligible as the opposite terms *relative* and *finite*—but that we cannot apprehend *how* the attributes of absoluteness and infinity coexist with the personal attributes of God, though we may believe *that*, in some manner unknown to us, they do coexist. In like manner, we cannot *conceive how* a purely spiritual being sees and hears without the bodily organs of sight and hearing; yet we may *believe that* He does so in some manner. Belief is possible in the mere fact (τὸ ὄν). Conception must include the manner (τὸ πῶς).

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of our knowledge of God; and as such they cannot be set aside by the mere negative abstractions of the so-called Philosophy of the Unconditioned. Yet the consciousness of a Personal God is not in itself an intuition of the Absolute and Infinite, nor does it enable us to conceive the manner in which Absoluteness and Infinity coexist with Personality. We are thus led to the conviction that behind this positive conception of God as a Person there yet remains a mystery which in our present state of knowledge we are unable to penetrate—the mystery of a personality which is absolute and infinite, and therefore not identical with our relative and finite personality, though the latter among finite things is that which is most nearly analogous to it and its fittest representative in human thought and human speech. We are thus again thrown on the same distinction as before—the distinction between belief in the fact and conception of the manner. We believe *that* the Personal God required by our religious consciousness is also absolute and infinite, but we are unable to conceive *how* He is so. This is the general character of religious mysteries, as described in the words of Leibnitz:—"Il en est de même des autres mystères, où les esprits modérés trouveront toujours une explication suffisante pour croire, et jamais autant qu'il en faut pour comprendre. Il nous suffit d'un certain *ce que c'est* (τί ἐστι); mais le *comment* (πῶς) nous passe, et ne nous est point nécessaire."^a

^a See below, Lecture V., note 12. By explaining the word *comprendre* as denoting apprehension of the manner in which an object of thought exists, as distinguished from mere belief in the fact, Leibnitz shews that he employs this term in the sense in which I have above explained the term

conceive. In the same sense, M. Peisse, in his translation of Sir W. Hamilton's *Fragments*, p. 98, says, "Comprendre, c'est voir un terme en rapport avec un autre; c'est voir comme un ce qui est donné comme multiple." In this sense, I prefer, with Hamilton himself, to employ the term *con-*

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But if it be once admitted that the Divine Personality, as coexisting with Infinity, is so far mysterious to us that it is not apprehended by reason as existing in a particular manner, but accepted by faith as existing in some manner unknown to us, it follows that the positive knowledge which we have of God in this life, is not a knowledge of Him as He is in His absolute nature, but only as He is imperfectly represented by those qualities in His creatures which are analogous to, but not identical with His own. If we had a knowledge of the Divine Personality as it is in itself, we should know it as existing in a certain manner compatible with unconditioned action: and this knowledge of the manner would at once transform our conviction from an act of faith to a conception of reason. But, inasmuch as the only personality of which we have a positive knowledge is our own, and as our own personality can only be conceived as conditioned in time, it follows that the Divine Personality, in so far as it is exempt from conditions, does not resemble the only personality which we directly know, and is not adequately represented by it. This characteristic of our positive conceptions of the Divine nature and attributes, namely, that they are not derived from an immediate perception of the objects themselves, but from an imperfect representation of them in the analogous attributes of human nature, is what is intended to be expressed by the assertion that such conceptions are *regulative* but not *speculative*. By a *speculative conception* is meant a conception derived from an

ception rather than *comprehension*; the latter being frequently used by theological writers in a very different sense, to denote a perfect cognition of the whole nature and properties of an object. This ambiguity, which

forms one of the plausible points in Toland's attempt to shew that there is nothing in Christianity above reason, is pointed out by his antagonist Norris, in his *Reason and Faith*, p. 118, ed. 1697.

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immediate perception or other intuition of the object conceived, as when I form a notion of human seeing or hearing, or of human anger or pity, from my actual experience of these modes of consciousness in myself; and a speculative truth is a truth expressed by means of such conceptions. A *regulative* conception, on the other hand, is a conception derived, not from the immediate perception or intuition of the object itself, but from that of something else, supposed more or less nearly to resemble it; and a *regulative truth* is a truth expressed by means of such conceptions. Thus when I speak of God as seeing or hearing, or as feeling anger or pity, I do not mean that He has precisely the same modes of consciousness which are expressed by these terms when applied to man, but I borrow from the human consciousness terms which express indirectly and by way of analogy certain divine attributes of which I have no immediate apprehension in themselves. Regulative conceptions are thus accommodations adapted to human faculties, serving as rules and guides to direct our thoughts in relation to things which we are unable to conceive immediately. The same distinction is expressed in the language of Bishop Pearson in the continuation of the passage quoted on p. ix. “At Deus non potest aliter a nobis naturaliter cognosci, nisi relate ad creaturas, scil. aut sub ratione dominii, aut sub ratione causæ, aut aliqua alia relatione. Ergo non potest per se primo a nobis cognosci, sine interventu creaturarum, per ordinem ad quas cognoscitur.”

In the Fifth Lecture, the distinction between speculative and regulative conceptions is further pursued in relation to other questions besides those of Theology. It is shewn that in problems of a purely philosophical character, no less than in those of Theology, the attempt to arrive at an absolutely first and unconditioned principle involves us in apparent contradictions, and we are compelled to

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acquiesce, as our highest point of positive thought, in principles which we practically assume and act upon as true without being able to conceive how they are true, and which necessarily imply the existence of a mysterious and inconceivable reality beyond themselves. A parallel is thus established between Natural Theology and Philosophy: the limitations of which we are conscious in our attempts to conceive the absolute nature of God, being shewn to be analogous to those which hinder us from attaining to an absolute first principle in such problems as those concerning Liberty and Necessity, Unity and Plurality, the Intercourse of Soul and Body, and the nature of Space and Time. The difficulties in Theology are thus shewn to arise, not from any peculiar antagonism between theology and human reason, but from conditions to which reason is universally subject, and which necessarily imply the existence of truths which are above reason. The analogy is then extended to Revealed Theology; and the method followed by Scripture in its representations of the Divine Nature is shewn to proceed upon an acknowledgment of the same law of thought, and to be thus adapted to the constitution of the human mind.

In the Sixth and Seventh Lectures, the principles thus established are applied with special reference to those Christian doctrines which have been attacked on the ground of their supposed antagonism to the conclusions of human reason, speculative or moral. The insufficiency of such attacks is shewn, on the ground that the so-called rational representations themselves are liable to similar objections, and naturally so, because the difficulties arise, not from defects peculiar to Revelation, but from the limits of human thought in general. Having arrived at this result, we are entitled to speak of the so-called contradictions between Reason and Revelation as merely apparent, not real contradictions; for in order to know two

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ideas to be really contradictory, it is necessary to have a positive and distinct conception of both as they are in themselves; whereas we have no such positive conception of divine things *per se*, but only an imperfect representation through their analogy to finite things.

We are now in a position to answer the question proposed at the beginning of these remarks, viz.—What is the value of our rational conceptions of the Divine Nature in their highest development? Are they exact representations of that nature, leading to conclusions of scientific certainty, comparable to those of mathematics or of physical science? or are they merely approximate representations, leading only to probabilities, which may be balanced and modified by counter-probabilities of another kind? It is evident that they are the latter, not the former. For if we cannot attain to a positive conception of the nature of an Absolute and Infinite Being, we are not in a position to deduce with certainty the necessary properties of that nature, so as to establish a deductive science of theology comparable to mathematical demonstration: and if we have not a direct experience of the divine attributes in themselves, but only of human attributes, analogous to them but not identical with them, we cannot construct an inductive science of theology comparable to the physical sciences which are founded on the direct experience and observation of natural objects. We are compelled to reason by analogy; and analogy furnishes only probabilities, varying, it may be, from slight presumptions up to moral certainties, but whose weight in any given case can only be determined by comparison with other evidences. There are three distinct sources from which we may form a judgment about the ways of God—first, from our own moral and intellectual consciousness, by which we judge *à priori* of what God ought to do in a given case, by determining what we should think it wise or right for

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ourselves to do in a similar case; secondly, from the constitution and course of nature, from which we may learn by experience what God's Providence in certain cases actually is; and thirdly, from Revelation, attested by its proper evidences. Where these three agree in their testimony (as in the great majority of cases they do) we have the moral certainty which results from the harmony of all accessible evidences: where they appear to differ, we have no right at once to conclude that the second or the third must give way to the first, and not *vice versâ*; because we have no right to assume that the first alone is infallible. But if Reason is *fallible* in matters of religion, it does not follow that it is *worthless*. Where no revelation has been given, it is man's only guide: where a real or supposed revelation exists, it may sift the evidences on which it rests; it may expose the pretences of a false revelation; it may aid in the interpretation of a true one. But while acknowledging the services of Reason in these respects, we must also acknowledge that a Revelation tested by sufficient evidence is superior to reason, and may correct the errors to which reason is liable; and, consequently, that *exactly in proportion to the strength of the remaining evidence for the divine origin of a religion is the probability that our reason may be mistaken when it concludes this or that portion of its contents to be unworthy of God*. We are bound to believe that a Revelation given by God can never contain anything that is really unwise or unrighteous; but a fallible Reason may suppose things to be unwise or unrighteous which are not really so.

From this estimate of the relations between Reason and Revelation, one other conclusion necessarily follows. If in proportion to the strength of the evidence for the divine origin of a revelation is the probability that reason may be in error in judging any portion of its contents to be unworthy of God, it will follow that where the divine

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origin of the Revelation is fully established, the authority of Reason as a criterion is reduced to its lowest point. Hence there is a special inconsistency in the conduct of those who, while admitting the divine origin of Christianity, claim a right, on rational grounds, to select a portion of the teaching of Christ as permanent and essential, and to reject the remainder as temporary or unessential. If the divine authority of Christ's teaching be once admitted, the acceptance of all that can be plainly shewn to belong to that teaching follows as a matter of course: and, on the other hand, if any portion of that teaching be rejected on rational grounds, this can only be legitimately done on the assumption that the whole is of human origin, not a divine Revelation.

This submission of Reason to the authority of Revelation is not, of course, a solution of our rational difficulties: it is only a belief notwithstanding those difficulties, and a trust that there is a solution, though we may be unable to find it. And thus it is that an examination of the Limits of Religious Thought leads us ultimately to rest not on Reason but on Faith; appeals, not to our knowledge, but to our ignorance; and shews that our intellectual trial in this life is analogous to our moral trial, that as there are real temptations to sin which nevertheless do not abrogate the duty of right conduct, so there are real temptations to doubt, which nevertheless do not abrogate the duty of belief.

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TESTIMONIES OF THEOLOGIANs

TO THE

PRINCIPAL DOCTRINE MAINTAINED IN THESE LECTURES,
IN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FORMS:

1. That the Absolute Nature of God is unknown to man.
2. That conceptions derived from human consciousness do not represent the Absolute Nature of God.
3. That God is revealed in Scripture by means of relative conceptions, accommodated to man's faculties.

I. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA.—*Strom.*, ii. 16, p. 168, Sylb.: "The Divine Nature cannot be described as it really is. The Prophets have spoken to us, fettered as we are by the flesh, according to our ability to receive their saying, the Lord accommodating Himself to human weakness for our salvation" [Translated by Bishop Kaye, *Clem. Alex.*, p. 141]. *Strom.* v. 12, p. 251. "The first principle of all things cannot be named. And if we give it a name, not properly (*ὁ κρυπτός*), calling it either One, or the Good, or Intellect, or the Very Existent, or Father, or God, or Maker, or Lord, we speak not as declaring its name, but by reason of our deficiency we employ good names, in order that the reason may be able to rest upon these, not wandering around others. For these names are not severally indicative of God, but all collectively exhibit the power of the Almighty: for the names of things are given to them either from the properties belonging to

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them, or from their relation to each other: but none of these can be received concerning God."

II. ORIGEN.—*De Princ.*, I. i., 5, 6: "Our mind, while it is confined within the barriers of flesh and blood, and by partaking of such matter is made duller and more obtuse, though it be far more excellent than the body, yet when it strives after incorporeal things, and seeks to behold them, scarcely obtains so much as the light of a spark or a lantern. But of all intellectual, that is incorporeal beings, what is so surpassing, what so ineffably and inconceivably excellent as God? whose nature cannot be gazed at and beheld by the sharp-sightedness of any human mind, though that mind be the purest and most clear. But to make this thing more manifest, we may not unfitly use another similitude. It sometimes happens that our eyes are unable to behold the very nature of light; that is to say, the substance of the sun; but by beholding his brightness or rays poured in, it may be, through windows, or other small receptacles of light, we are able to consider how great is the nutriment and fountain of bodily light. Thus, then, the works of Divine Providence and the design of this universe are, as it were, rays of the Divine Nature, as compared with His substance and nature. Whereas, then, our mind is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is, yet from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures it understands the parent of the universe."

III. CYPRIAN.—*De Idol. Vanit.*, c. 9: "We cannot see Him; He is too bright for our vision; we cannot reach Him; He is too pure for our touch; we cannot scan Him; He is too great for our intelligence; and therefore we but think of Him worthily when we own Him to be beyond our thought." (*Sic eum digne æstimamus dum*

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inæstimabilem dicimus.) [Translated in *Library of the Fathers*, Oxford, 1846. The same words are also found in MUNICIUS FELIX, *Octav.* c. 18.]

IV. ARNOBIUS.—*Adv. Gentes*, iii. 19: “If you do not refuse to hear what we think, we are so far from attributing to God bodily lineaments, that we fear to ascribe to so great an object even the graces of the mind, and the very virtues in which to excel is hardly granted to a few. For who can speak of God as brave, as constant, as moderate, as wise? who can say that He is honest, or temperate? nay, who will say that He knows any thing, that He understands, that He acts with foresight, that He directs the determination of His actions towards definite ends of duty? These are human goods, and as opposed to vices deserve a laudable reputation; but who is there so dull of heart and stupid as to call God great in human goods, or to speak of the surpassing majesty of His name as if it consisted in a freedom from the stain of vices? Whatever you can say of God, whatever you can conceive in silent thought, passes into a human sense, and is corrupted thereby: nothing can properly signify and denote Him which is expressed in terms of human speech framed for human uses. There is but one way in which man may understand with certainty concerning the nature of God, and that is, to know and feel that nothing can be expressed concerning Him in mortal speech.”

V. ATHANASIUS.—*C. Gentes*, c. 2: “God, the Creator of the universe, and King of all things, who is above all substance and human thought.” *Orat. II. contra Arianos*, c. 32: “Such examples and such images are presented in Scripture, in order that, since human nature is unable to comprehend concerning God, we may by means of these be able to understand in small part and dimly, to the best

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of our capacity." *Ibid.*, c. 36. "We ought not to inquire why the Word of God is not such as ours, since God, as we have said, is not such as we are. Nor is it seemly to inquire how the Word is of God, or how He is the brightness of God, or how and in what manner He is begotten of God. For one would be mad who dared to inquire into these things, as deeming that a thing unspeakable and proper to the nature of God, and known only to Him and to the Son, can itself be expressed in words."

VI. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM.—*Catech.*, vi. 2: "We declare not what God is, but candidly confess that we know not accurately concerning Him. For in those things which concern God, it is great knowledge to confess our ignorance."

VII. BASIL.—Ep. cccxxiv.: "That God is, I know; but what is His essence I hold to be above reason. How then am I saved? by faith; and faith is competent to know *that* God is, not *what* He is." *Adv. Eunom.* i. 12: "In a word, for a man to think that he has found out the very substance of the supreme God is the height of arrogance and pride; . . . for let us inquire of him from what source he claims to have arrived at the intelligence of it. Is it from common thinking? This suggests to us that God is, not what He is. Is it from the teaching of the Spirit? Of what kind is this teaching, and where is it to be found? . . . What of Paul, that chosen vessel, in whom Christ spake, who was caught up to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter,—what teaching did he proclaim to us concerning the essence of God? Who, when he but looked into the partial relations (λόγους) of God's dispensation, as though giddy at beholding the impenetrable vision, broke forth into the

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cry, ‘*O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.*’ But if these things cannot be reached by those who have attained to the measure of the knowledge of Paul, how great is the folly of those who boast that they know the essence of God.” *Ibid.*, c. 14: “But I think that the comprehension of the Divine essence is not only beyond man, but beyond every rational nature—I mean of created beings.”

VIII. GREGORY NYSSEN.—*C. Eunom.*, Orat. xii. (*Opera*, ed. 1615, vol. ii. p. 312): “And as, when we behold the heaven, and by the organs of the sense of sight attain in some sort to that beauty which is on high, we doubt not that that which is seen by us exists, but when asked what it is, we are unable to interpret its nature in speech So, too, with regard to the Creator of the world, we know that He is, but deny not that we are ignorant of the definition of His essence.”

IX. GREGORY NAZIANZEN.—Orat. xxxiv. (*Opera*, 1630, vol. i. p. 538: “A theologian among the Greeks [Plato] has said in his philosophy that to conceive God is difficult, to express Him is impossible. . . . But I say that it is impossible to express Him, and more impossible to conceive Him (φράσαι μὲν ἀδύνατον, νοῆσαι δὲ ἀδυνατώτερον).” *Ibid.*, p. 548: “What God is in His nature and essence, no man hath ever yet discovered, nor can discover. Whether he ever will discover it, let those who please inquire and speculate. In my opinion, he will then discover it, when this godlike and divine thing, I mean our intellect and reason, shall have mingled with that which is cognate to itself, and the image shall have ascended to the archetype of which it now has the desire.”

X. CHRYSOSTOM.—*De Incompr. Dei Natura*, Hom. i. 3:

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“That God is everywhere, I know; and that He is wholly everywhere, I know; but the *how*, I know not: that he is without beginning, ungenerated and eternal, I know; but the *how*, I know not.” Hom. iii. 2: “Observe the accuracy of Paul. He speaks of God, not as being an unapproachable light, but as *dwelling in the light that no man can approach unto*, that you may learn that if the dwelling is unapproachable, how much more is God who dwelleth in it. . . . Nor does he say that God dwelleth in light *incomprehensible*, but *unapproachable*, which is far more than incomprehensible. For a thing is said to be incomprehensible when, having been sought and inquired after, it is not comprehended by those who inquire after it; but that is unapproachable which admits of no inquiry at all, and to which none can draw nigh. Thus a sea is called incomprehensible (unfathomable) into which divers may cast themselves and descend to a great depth without being able to find the bottom; but that is called unapproachable which cannot at all be inquired into or sought.” *Ibid.*, c. 3: “But that you may learn that this light is unapproachable, not only to men, but to the higher powers, hear the words of Isaiah: ‘*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up: above it stood the Seraphims; each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet.*’ Why, I ask, do they cover their faces and put their wings before them? Why, but because they cannot bear the lightning that springs out of the throne, and those flashing rays? And yet they saw not the light itself untempered, nor the substance itself in purity, but what they saw was a condescension (*συνκατάβασις*). And what is a condescension? It is when God is not manifested as He is, but shews himself in such manner as he who can see Him is able to bear, measuring the exhibition according to the weakness of sight of the beholders.”

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XI. HILARY OF POITIERS.—*De Trinitate*, iv. 2: “But we are not ignorant that neither speech of men nor comparison of human nature can suffice for the unfolding of Divine things. For that which is unspeakable admits not of the end and measure of any significance of words; and that which is spiritual is different from the appearance and example of bodily things. Yet when we discourse of heavenly natures, those very things which are bounded by the understanding of our minds must be expressed by the use of common nature and speech, not certainly as suitable to the dignity of God, but as necessary to the infirmity of our intellectual capacity, which must speak that which we think and understand by means of our own things and words.”

XII. AUGUSTINE.—Enarr. in Psalm lxxxv. 8: “God is ineffable; we more easily say what He is not than what He is.” Serm. cccxli.: “I call God just, because in human words I find nothing better; for He is beyond justice. . . . What then is worthily said of God? Some one, perhaps, may reply and say, *that He is just*. But another, with better understanding, may say that even this word is surpassed by His excellence, and that even this is said of Him unworthily, though it be said fittingly according to human capacity.”

XIII. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA.—*In Joann. Evang.*, l. ii., c. 5: “For those things which are spoken concerning it [the Divine Nature] are not spoken as they are in very truth, but as the tongue of man can interpret, and as man can hear; for he who sees in an enigma also speaks in an enigma.”

XIV. DAMASCENUS.—*De Fide Orthod.*, i. 4: “That God is, is manifest; but what He is in His essence and nature