

**William Ewart Gladstone and Christian Apologetics, 1859-  
1896**

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## Abstract

Most historians have overlooked the extent to which Gladstone's construction of a coherent Christian apologetic evolved beyond the 1850s. There is also a need to understand the chronology of his modes of engagement in the application of his mature apologetic. Gladstone did not operate in largely separate political and religio-philosophical spheres. Therefore, his later theological views have a greater relevance to the study of his wider political and cultural interests. His mature position as an Anglican churchman was liberal catholicism: a development, but not a renunciation, of his earlier pre-tractarian high churchmanship. Historians have already identified the late 1840s and early 1850s as a period of theological evolution in the mind of Gladstone. This thesis argues that there was another period of critical reformation in Gladstone's religious views in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Nevertheless, there were additional modest developments in the later Gladstone's theology as a result of continuing public engagement with Christian apologetics. A wider range of sources than hitherto assembled for the study of Gladstone as apologist is used to attempt a reconstruction of Gladstone's method: to try and trace a mind in action. In the formation of these views the use of Gladstone's private memoranda and marginalia emerge as a key (and much neglected) source. Gladstone's position was a framework rather than a set of finely articulated doctrines; it was not isomorphic but fluid. This is why it is important to stress the hermeneutic key of this study. This was Gladstone's continued preoccupation with the nature of theological method. It is in the way he worked out a position, rather than his specific conclusions (which varied within a determined range of opinions), that the most significant aspect of his later mind in general is seen deployed. Consequently, there is the need to revise the overall picture of Gladstone as an intellectual in political and public life. Part one of this thesis shows how Gladstone laboured in private and in public to reach a mature epistemology. Part two demonstrates how he applied this in a series of controversial debates active amongst the clergy and intelligentsia of later-Victorian Britain.



### Abbreviations.

- CPR W. E. Gladstone, *Church Principles Considered in their Results* (London, 1840).
- EH "Ecce Homo" (London, 1868).
- Gladstone *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew, 14 vols.  
Diaries (Oxford, 1968-94).
- Gleanings W. E. Gladstone, *Gleanings of Past Years, 1843-79*, 7 vols. (London, 1879).
- GGP Glynne-Gladstone Papers, Flintshire County Record Office, Hawarden.
- GP Gladstone Papers, British Library, London.
- HP Huxley Papers, Imperial College Library, London.
- IR W. E. Gladstone, *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* (London, 1890;  
Second edition, 1892).
- Later *W. E. Gladstone, Later Gleanings. A New Series of Gleanings of Past Years*  
Gleanings (London, 1897; Second edition, 1898).

- MMP Friedrich Max Müller Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford
- SP *Speeches and Pamphlets*, St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden.
- SPB 'General Introduction', in Lorimer, G. C. (ed.) *The People's Bible History* (London, 1896). [*Sheppard's Pictorial Bible*].
- SRC *The State in its Relations with the Church* (London, 1838; Fourth edition, 1841).
- SSB *Studies Subsidiary to the Works of Bishop Butler* (Oxford, 1896).
- WJB W.E. Gladstone. (ed.) *The Works of Joseph Butler, D. C. L., Sometime Lord Bishop of Durham. Divided into Sections; with Sectional Headings; An Index to each Volume; and Some Occasional Notes. Also Prefatory Matter, 2 Vols.* (Oxford, 1896).

## Gladstone Annotation Key\*

I	Notice
NB	Special Notice
n.	Note
+	Approbation
V	Likely a tick of Approbation
^	Likely to be the opposite of, or qualification of, the above
q q	Likely to mean a query
X	Disapprobation
XX XXX	Special disapprobation
?	A doubt
<i>ma</i>	A reservation or qualification
!	Disbelief or surprise (at statement, or, <u>manner</u> of statement)

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\* This key is based on Gladstone's own, which is described in R. Clayton, 'W. E. Gladstone: An Annotation Key', *Notes and Queries*, New Series, 48, no. 2, (June, 2001), 140-143. I have made several additions, incorporating annotations not found in the original key.

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## INTRODUCTION: CHRISTIAN BELIEF - 'THE QUESTION OF QUESTIONS'.

It has long been recognised that religion, for Gladstone, was the "pole-star" of his existence; in which "every question becomes one of detail only".<sup>1</sup> Writing at the close of his long life, the recently retired premier continued to lament the predominance in men's minds of the temporal over 'things unseen and eternal'.<sup>2</sup> For the last three decades of his life Gladstone ruminated and wrote on "(t)he one controversy which, according to my deep conviction overshadows, and in the last resort absorbs, all others is the controversy between faith and unbelief".<sup>3</sup> Thus the underlying framework behind much, if not all, of Gladstone's later religious thought, was the articulation and defence of a mature Christian apologetic, capable of withstanding both the secular and the religious buffetings of the age. If this is ever doubted, one need only consider Gladstone's comments on the thought of the German Liberal Catholic Johann Adam Möhler, comments that reflected a lifelong interest in this subject.

If, out of every hundred professing Christians, ninety-nine assert amidst all their separate and clashing convictions their belief in the central doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, will not every member of each particular Church or community be forward to declare - will not the candid unbeliever be disposed freely to admit, that this unity amidst diversity is a great confirmation of the faith, and a broad basis upon which to build our hopes of the future?<sup>4</sup>

However, the three main biographies of Gladstone: John Morley (1903), Colin Matthew (1986, 1995; one volume reprint 1997) and Richard Shannon (1982, 1999), have all struggled with this aspect of Gladstone's religious and philosophical thought. Only with Ruth Clayton's thesis and the publication of David Bebbington's recent study has any detailed attention been devoted to Gladstone's later theological development to supplement the analysis of his early and emerging theology undertaken by Perry Butler (1982) and Peter Jagger (1991).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Diary entry 16 August 1840. See J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, (London, Popular edition, 1907), Vol. 1, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'Soliloquium and Postscript', in *Later Gleanings. A New Series of Gleanings of Past Years, Theological and Ecclesiastical*, (London, 1898), p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 396, 399 and 401-402.

<sup>5</sup> See reference to Morley above. H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone. 1809-1898*, (Oxford, 1997); R. Shannon, *Gladstone. Peel's Inheritor. 1809-1865*, (London, 1999), originally published 1982, and *Gladstone. Heroic Minister. 1865-1898*, (London, 1999), D. W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*.



Indeed the shadow of Morley's Gladstone was cast over most of the subsequent scholarship on Gladstone for the next one hundred years. The first editor of Gladstone's diaries, M. R. D. Foot, the historian D. M. Schreuder and the critic A. O. J. Cockshut have argued that this reflected the fact that Morley's magisterial biography was an overtly political and 'liberal' life of the statesman.<sup>6</sup> The small volume by D. C. Lathbury (1907) and his edited collection of some of Gladstone's letters on church and religion (1910) did little to move the argument on in favour of seeing Gladstone as one of the great lay Christian Apologists of the nineteenth century. Hence, one finds the unhelpful and surprisingly naive comment from Lathbury that "(t)heologically, what he [Gladstone] was in 1845 he was to the end".<sup>7</sup>

Yet within a year of Gladstone's death several essays that reflected upon his overall religious development emphasised the continuing evolution of his religious views in later life. In particular they noted the significance of his flirtation with ideas outside of mainstream Anglicanism on future life and punishment.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore it is puzzling to find that until the publication of Bebbington's *The Mind of Gladstone*, (2004), almost all the biographers and historians who had studied Gladstone made one general assumption: that his philosophical and theological mindset remained in essentials unchanged after 1850. This is also the date at which Perry Butler's study of the evolution of Gladstone's religious beliefs effectively terminated. For over twenty years since its publication, Butler's monograph (and the thesis upon which it was based) remained the most detailed study of Gladstone's religion. Peter Jagger's revised thesis helpfully refined the trajectory mapped out by Butler. A promised second volume charting Gladstone's religious life from 1832-1898 never followed.

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*Religion, Homer and Politics*, (Oxford, 2004); P. Butler, *Gladstone: Church, State and Tractarianism. A Study of His Religious Ideas and Attitudes, 1809-1859*, (Oxford, 1982); and P. J. Jagger, *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician. The Personal Religious Life and Development of William Ewart Gladstone, 1809-1832*, Princeton Theological Monograph No. 28, (Pennsylvania, 1991). See also R. Clayton, 'Enlarging the Text': A Cultural History of William Ewart Gladstone's Library and Reading, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, (2003), especially Chapter Six, pp. 186-217.

<sup>6</sup> *The Gladstone Diaries*, Volume 1, 1825-1832, edited by M. R. D. Foot, (Oxford, 1968), xxv and xxxvi, D. M. Schreuder, 'The Making of Mr Gladstone's Posthumous Career: The Role of Morley and Knaplund as 'Monumental Masons', 1903-27', in B. L. Kinzer, (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind: Essays Presented to J. B. Conacher*, (Toronto, 1985), p. 199 and A. J. O. Cockshut, *Truth to Life. The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1974), p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> D. C. Lathbury, *Mr Gladstone*, (London, 1907), p.16. See also Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, Two Volumes, (London, 1910).

<sup>8</sup> G. W. E. Russell, *Mr Gladstone's Religious Development: A Paper Read in Christ Church, May 5, 1899*, (London, Second edition, 1899), pp. 54-56. M. MacColl, 'Mr Gladstone as a Theologian' in Sir W. Reid (ed.), *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, (London, 1899), pp. 269-72. See Clayton, *Enlarging the Text*, Chapter Six.

Butler had very definite and limited aims. The main one was to trace the course of Gladstone's religious development in the first half of his life. In particular, Butler concentrated upon how and why Gladstone became an Anglican High-Churchman, the development of his ideas on Church and State and the relationship of these to the Oxford movement, and, finally, the intense relationship between Gladstone, Henry Edward Manning and James Hope (later Hope-Scott).<sup>9</sup> Neither this study nor that by Jagger, touched upon Gladstone's Christian apologetics in any detail.

Another idea, which often occurs in studies on Gladstone, is that he operated in separate political and religio-philosophical spheres. Hence a study of Gladstone as theologian would have little, if any, relevance to the study of Gladstone as a politician and social commentator. Together, these assumptions mean that little detailed examination of Gladstone's later apologetics, or religious views in general, has been undertaken. Certainly much of the material, published and unpublished, used for this study has not received the attention it merits; indeed it has barely even been recognised.<sup>10</sup>

This was not through a lack of sympathy on the part of biographers or historians for their subject. Matthew and Shannon, for example, both devoted large sections of their biographies to Gladstone's religion. What was lacking was a unifying framework, or sense of coherency. Thus the many pertinent points on Gladstone's relationship to the thought of Bishop Butler, his Homeric studies, and his intellectual weakness in science were left swamped in a sea of wider political analysis.<sup>11</sup> The less ambitious, and more general, biographies by Philip Magnus (1954) and Roy Jenkins (1995) similarly floundered by refusing to take seriously Gladstone's apologetics, seeing them (to borrow a description from Lord Tennyson) as little more than an indifferent hobbyhorse.<sup>12</sup>

Where the general biographies fared better was in supplying a link between Gladstone's essentially apologetical frame of mind in religion from the 1860s to the 1890s and the contemporary debate on Britain's perceived cultural decline and the attempt to combat this in Gladstone's thought by referring to the statesman's earlier interest in the

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<sup>9</sup> Butler, *Gladstone: Church, State and Tractarianism*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew, for example, in his biography notes the importance of Gladstone's 1876 memorandum on future retribution, but relegates any consideration of it to a footnote. Given that he acknowledges that the subject was "a central intellectual concern of the day", his short discussion of Gladstone's engagement with it hardly reflects this, or its importance to Gladstone. Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 259-61.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 154 ff, 238 ff, 255 ff, 489-90, 571-72 and 624 ff. Shannon, *Gladstone. Peel's Inheritor*, pp. 316 ff, *Gladstone Heroic Minister*, pp. 116 ff, 144 f, 474 f and 573 ff.

<sup>12</sup> R. Jenkins, *Gladstone*, (London, 1995), pp. 182 and 401. P. Magnus, *Gladstone. A Biography*, (London, 1954), pp. 123 and 432.



importance of a Coleridgean clerisy. Indeed the main strength of the works of Matthew, Shannon and Jenkins is a discussion of Gladstone's later 'moral' politics, his anti-metropolitanism, the Midlothian campaign, and the selfishness and corruption of the upper ten thousand.<sup>13</sup> In the first volume of his biography Shannon stressed the importance to the younger Gladstone of a ruling elite of guardians dedicated as much to the moral as to the political well being of the nation. He suggested that the essence of Gladstone's Peelite *étatisme* could be found in this. Shannon characterised this as the *leitmotif* of Gladstone's politics.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew in his biography (based, mainly, on his Introductions as editor of the Gladstone diaries) again linked the idea of the clerisy and culture in the thought of Gladstone with the later political campaigns of the 1870s and 1880s; that is, those over Bulgaria, Midlothian and Home Rule. The great benefit of Matthew's seminal analysis was to show the link between these and Gladstone's belief in the continuing cultural and hegemonic role of the Anglican Church as a compromise in which all reasonable people could be accommodated.<sup>15</sup> In discussing this in greater depth Matthew stressed that the broadening out of Gladstone's theology in his middle and later years bore directly upon his political vision. He stressed the Arnoldian, Broad Church emphasis on a 'unity of action'. In effect, Matthew saw the later Gladstone as High-Church in conception, Evangelical in conviction and Broad Church in presentation.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, however penetrating and sophisticated this analysis was it failed to find connections between Gladstone's ideas on society and the clerisy and his mature Christian apologetics. That is, there was little attempt to link up Gladstone's epistemology and philosophical convictions with his wider concerns or to examine in detail how and why Gladstone reached such a framework.

Outside of the biographies, the literature on Gladstone is still predominantly political. Several studies continued to stress Gladstone's desire for the Anglican Church to be more inclusive, one that reflected the broader aspirations of the mature man's churchmanship.<sup>17</sup> Agatha Ramm in an important article, and later short study, shed

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<sup>13</sup> Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp. 412-26; Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 39-43, 65 ff, 238-39, 261-71, 294-305, 336, 499 ff and 523; Shannon, *Gladstone. Peel's Inheritor*, pp. 86, 116, 448, 531 and 542 and *Gladstone. Heroic Minister*, pp. 116 ff, 144, 150, 281, 473-74 and 567-81 *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone. Peel's Inheritor*, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 65 ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263-71.

<sup>17</sup> M. D. Stephen, 'Liberty, Church and State: Gladstone's Relations with Manning and Acton, 1832-70', *Journal of Religious History*, 1, (1975), p. 226; J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion. Gladstone and the*



revealing light on Gladstone's views on the place of reason in relation to religion.<sup>18</sup> These reinforced Matthew's comments on the importance of the role of Aristotle and Bishop Joseph Butler in the philosophical as well as religious thought of Gladstone.<sup>19</sup> Matthew had previously drawn attention to the persistent ambivalence in the mind of Gladstone between varieties of empiricism and idealism.<sup>20</sup>

Before discussing how this study relates to the above, it is necessary to briefly examine the work of David Bebbington in relation to Gladstone's religion. Thirty years ago whilst investigating the links between Gladstone and Non-Conformity, Bebbington suggested a line of research, which he developed in greater detail in a biographical study (1993) and a major study of Gladstone, Religion and Homer (2004). According to Bebbington the later Gladstone came to see himself less as a protagonist for Church principles and more as a staunch Christian apologist engaged in a common defence of Christianity against unbelief.<sup>21</sup> In later years Gladstone combined the open mindedness of the Broad Church with the evangelical dynamism of High Church Catholicity.<sup>22</sup> The majority of Gladstone's later religious writings were apologetic.<sup>23</sup> Peter Erb, a few years later, reinforced this renewed interest in Gladstone's apologetics with an article on the influence of German Liberal Catholicism on the statesman's thought.<sup>24</sup> Both Erb and Bebbington stress Gladstone's lifelong interest in Christian unity and draw attention to a heretofore little studied article, *Universitas Hominum; or, the Unity of History* (1887) in which Gladstone views the unity of history and humanity in providential terms.<sup>25</sup>

However, the most significant modern assessment of Gladstone's later religious apologetics is Bebbington's previously mentioned recent study. This built upon an earlier

*Liberal Party, 1867-1875*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 154-58; S. Gilley, 'Gladstone on Church and State', in P. Francis, (ed.) *The Gladstone Umbrella*, (Hawarden, 2001), p. 4; and A. Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (1985), pp. 333-38.

<sup>18</sup> A. Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', *loc. cit.*, and *William Ewart Gladstone*, (Cardiff, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 20, 33-35, 342, 489-90, 571-72 and 624 ff.

<sup>20</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Vaticanism and the Question of the East', in D. Baker (ed.), *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian. Studies in Church History*, (Oxford, 1978), 417-42. See also p. xxvi of Matthew's introduction to the third volume of the Gladstone diaries (Oxford, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Non-Conformists: A Religious Affinity in Politics', in D. Baker (ed.) *Church, Society and Politics. Studies in Church History*, Vol. 12, (Oxford, 1975), p. 381. See also his *William Ewart Gladstone. Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain*, (Grand Rapids, 1993), and footnote 5 above for reference to Bebbington's latest work on Gladstone.

<sup>22</sup> Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>24</sup> P. C. Erb, 'Gladstone and German Liberal Catholicism', *Recusant History*, Vol. 23, part 3, (1997), 450-69.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 453 and Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone*, p. 238.



study (on Gladstone and Homer), in papers originally presented to a conference marking the centenary of Gladstone's death. The most important conclusion was to show how Gladstone's ideas on Homer evolved from the 1850s to the 1890s in a way that took account of contemporary debate and scholarship. In addition, during this period Gladstone also used classical studies to bolster support for divine revelation.<sup>26</sup>

In *The Mind of Gladstone*, Bebbington demonstrated that this Homeric scholarship was partly the result of a liberalising trend in the statesman's theology; one in which incarnationalism assumed a much greater role.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, attention was finally given to a detailed and coherent analysis of Gladstone's engagement with unbelief that formed his central intellectual preoccupation in later life. This apologetic had been neglected in previous Gladstone studies. Gladstone's engagement with J. F. Stephen, Huxley, Colonel Ingersoll, Mrs Humphry Ward (and her novel *Robert Elsmere*), Biblical criticism and Butler have all received impressive and convincing attention by Bebbington.<sup>28</sup> There was even a much-needed discussion of the influence of German Idealism, or rather the lack of it, on the overall thought of Gladstone.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Bebbington's combined studies helped to qualify the interpretation of Gladstone's theological politics provided by Boyd Hilton.<sup>30</sup> Hilton stressed the continuing evangelical content of Gladstone's later thought. However, Hilton's view needs to be supplemented by an examination of Gladstone which recognises that the stress on incarnationalism (including the atonement) was the result of a Patristically grounded Catholicism, rather than any lingering conservatism or the embrace of a liberal, modernist theology.<sup>31</sup>

Bebbington's study was also the first to make any systematic use of the two hundred or so household sermons delivered by Gladstone from the 1840s to the 1860s. Indeed, the question of sources for an examination into Gladstone's mature apologetic requires some sustained attention. This study has used three main sources. The first is a wide selection of private memoranda on theological and philosophical topics preserved in the Gladstone Papers in the British Library. The second is the use of correspondence located in the Gladstone Papers and other manuscript collections that bear directly on the

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<sup>26</sup> D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and Homer', in D. W. Bebbington and R. Swift, (eds.) *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool, 2000), 57-74, especially pp. 69 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 89-97, 139-41 and 154 ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17 and 218-54.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-67 and 299-300.

<sup>30</sup> B. Hilton, 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', in M. Bentley and J. Stevenson (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain*, (Oxford, 1983), 28-57 and *The Age of Atonement. The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865*, (Oxford, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 103-104.



topics chosen for this study. In respect of these, the Glynne-Gladstone Papers preserved at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden have been a very useful supplement to the main Gladstone papers. In all cases, the Gladstone diaries published by Oxford University Press have been used as a key reference and cross-referencing source. However, a third, major, source has been an examination of Gladstone's marginalia from his personal copies of works referred to in the diaries, memoranda and correspondence. These were selected from amongst the 27,000 volumes deposited by Gladstone as the core of the original library at Hawarden.

Why are Gladstone's marginalia an important source and what is the extent of their usefulness? It has been known since before Gladstone's death that he made notes or marks, as he read, in books that were of interest to him.<sup>32</sup> Colin Matthew noted how Gladstone was "a careful, if rapid reader". He noted how Gladstone would annotate his books with various marks and sometimes make the odd comment or construct a short index for a book.<sup>33</sup> However, it is only in the last decade or so that there has been recognition of the importance of the marginalia as a valid, if overlooked, historical source for the mind of Gladstone.<sup>34</sup> Ruth Clayton whilst undertaking research for her doctorate on Gladstone's library discovered Gladstone's own handwritten key to his marginalia. She comments on the importance of this discovery, (echoing John Powell's pleas for a wider recognition and use of Gladstone's marginalia): "the key to Gladstone's annotations will remain of primary interest to those seeking explanation of specific marginalia. It is unfortunately not exhaustive", but will at least allow historians to feel more confident in studying and citing Gladstone's marginal responses to the texts with which he engaged".<sup>35</sup>

This study, then, reinforces the points made by Powell, Bebbington and Clayton on the use of the marginalia. The marginalia can only ever be a supplementary or corroborative form of evidence that must be used in conjunction with the diaries, memoranda and correspondence. Nonetheless they provide a vital insight into the workings of Gladstone's mind: how he read books; why he thought certain passages

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Edward Hamilton's *Mr. Gladstone. A Monograph*, (London, 1898), pp. 64-65. See also, J. Powell, 'Small Marks and Instinctual Responses: A Study in the Use of Gladstone's Marginalia', *Nineteenth Century Prose*, Special Issue, XIX, No. 3, (1992), 1-17, especially p. 3. See notes made by Mrs Humphry Ward in Oxford, April 1888 on an interview with Gladstone, transcribed in W. S. Petersen, 'Gladstone's Review of "Robert Elsmere": Some Unpublished Correspondence', *Review of English Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 84, (1970), 442-61, especially pp. 451 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, p. 238 and Powell, 'Small Marks', p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> R. Clayton, 'W. E. Gladstone: An Annotation Key', *Notes and Queries*, New Series, Vol. 48, No. 2, (June 2001), 140-43.

\* Clayton notes, and probably correctly, that a small 'v' shape is likely a tick of approbation. In addition, a mark resembling 'qq' is likely to mean question or query.

<sup>35</sup> Clayton, 'W. E. Gladstone: An Annotation Key', p. 143. See reference to Powell in footnote 32.



stimulating, wrong or puzzling; and how he made momentary, instinctual judgements on his reading.<sup>36</sup> Very often the marginalia has proven remarkably similar to comments Gladstone made on certain books in his memoranda. For example, the similarity can be observed in his annotations of, and later comments on, E. Reeves Palmer's *The Development of Revelation*, M. Randles' *For Ever*, W. Graham's *The Creed of Science* and S. Butler's, *The Fair Haven*<sup>37</sup>. Even when the book is never mentioned again, cumulatively the use of the marginalia can show a trend in the mind of Gladstone when engaged in reading upon a certain topic. This in turn can be used as evidence and can be compared with his general views gathered from other verifiable public and private sources.

A few examples can illustrate the usefulness of engaging with Gladstone's marginalia. A very revealing example of Gladstone's annotation of Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* shows how Gladstone approached more generalised theological works. In the preface Gladstone noted Arnold's contention that "a great Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the Universe" can never be verified.<sup>38</sup> Later, Arnold contended that the Old Testament writers were moved by a vision of the Eternal, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. Against which Gladstone has written in the margin "how does he know?" and "why then not said?"<sup>39</sup> On page eighty-one Arnold writes, "we have seen how in its intuition of God...the Hebrew race found the revelation needed to breathe emotion into the laws of morality, and to make morality religion". Gladstone has underlined "we have seen" in the above quote and appended the comment "indeed!" next to it as well as highlighting the whole passage.<sup>40</sup> Clearly Gladstone was unimpressed by Arnold's argument. At one point, where Arnold is castigating the credibility of dogmatic theologians, Gladstone has marked "NB no sound proof given".<sup>41</sup> Arnold having denied that God can ever be verified either through reason or revelation then goes on to claim,

But surely, if there be anything with which metaphysics have nothing to do, and where a plain man, without skill to walk in the arduous paths of abstruse reasoning, may find himself at home, it is religion.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Powell, 'Small Marks', pp, 3 and 5.

<sup>37</sup> See bibliography for references to these works.

<sup>38</sup> M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma. An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of The Bible*, (London, 1873), p. x.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30 and 32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

To which Gladstone has replied, "yes: by dint of that very idea of God". That is, the 'plain man' is bound to feel at home, if one rejects the traditional Biblical and Christian idea of God. As Gladstone himself writes in the margin, "In order to retain our reverence for the Bible, we are to give up our belief in God?"<sup>43</sup> Arnold's later work *Last Essays on Church and Religion* is equally well, and for the most part negatively, annotated. For example, Gladstone's exasperation with Arnold's theology is clear. Arnold wrote: "Religion must be built upon ideas about which there are no puzzle". Gladstone, having marked the passage, wrote, "ma - a modest demand".<sup>44</sup>

In late 1872 and early 1873 Gladstone was involved in a great deal of reading in preparation for his address to Liverpool College in December 1872 and the subsequent publication of this as a pamphlet. This was one of Gladstone's first public ripostes against creeping unbelief and the perils of rationalism and scepticism. It involved debate with many people including Herbert Spencer, Professor Friederich Max Müller, and the Duke of Argyll. At the heart of this speech lay an attack on D. F. Strauss' *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*. Gladstone regarded this as a typical, and superficial, product of the age: an age fascinated by speculative, metaphysical German philosophy.

Indeed as late as 1890 Gladstone was still castigating this book as "the product of the old age of his [Strauss'] intellect (which at this point seemed to taste a little of decrepitude)..."<sup>45</sup> Gladstone conducted a spirited correspondence on this book (and the reply to it by Jakob Frohschammer) with Sir Robert Morier of the British legation in Munich.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it was Morier who sent Frohschammer's reply to Gladstone. It is therefore fascinating to study Gladstone's marginalia of these two works.

Gladstone's annotations are from the original German edition of Strauss, but the following examples have been cross-referenced to the contemporary English translation by Mathilde Blind.<sup>47</sup> The copy of Strauss is replete with notes of disapproval. Where Strauss contends that 'old' Christians fought for centuries about the metaphysical belief of the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> M. Arnold, *Last Essays on Church and Religion*, (London, 1877), p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', *Nineteenth Century*, XXVII, (March 1890), p. 384.

<sup>46</sup> See GP Add Mss 44437, ff. 86-87, Morier to Gladstone, 30 January 1873, 44438, ff. 333-50, Morier to Gladstone, 31 May 1873 and 44439, ff. 324-25, Morier to Gladstone, August? 1873.

<sup>47</sup> *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube. Ein Bekenntniss von David Friederich Strauss. Zweite Auflage.* (Leipzig, Verlag, von S. Hirzel, 1872). *The Old Faith and the New. A Confession by David Friederich Strauss. Authorised Translation from the Sixth Edition, by Mathilde Blind, Second edition,* (London, 1873). Hereafter cited as German and English editions.



Trinity with passion and weapons of acumen and sophistry, Gladstone has responded: "when did this begin?"<sup>48</sup> Comments such as "humbug", "a world-substance does it all...Reason not required" sum up Gladstone's opinion on Strauss' replacement of God with a dependence upon a Hegelian inspired *Universum*.<sup>49</sup>

A particularly revealing comment is Gladstone's noting of the following argument by Strauss with the comment "and this is philosophy!"

Let us picture a pious and well meaning man, but narrow minded as regards a purified conception of religion, who should be taken unawares not saying his prayers, but only making the gestures appropriate to the act. I will not say that he will naturally expect to grow embarrassed and confused, just as if he had been in a situation of which he must be ashamed. But why so? A person found speaking to himself is at first sight suspected of temporary insanity; and is he not quite judged somewhat similarly, if, being alone, his occupation or gesticulation is such as can only be used by him who has some other person before his eyes, which, nevertheless, is not so in the case supposed.<sup>50</sup>

In one of Gladstone's last important annotations, he has written, "This sums up the controversy?" next to Strauss' "We stand here [in regard to God as Creator] at the limits of our knowledge; we gaze into an abyss, we can fathom no farther".<sup>51</sup>

Frohschammer's reply to Strauss fares little better, with comments such as "Bold!"; "ma Contrast Butler's Method"; "A very shallow discussion of a very deep subject"; "An assumption"; and "This is fatal to the position of his own system".<sup>52</sup> This is Gladstone's view on what was supposed to be a Christian reply to Strauss. Morley, in his biography, quotes a letter [1873?] from Gladstone to Morier on Frohschammer's response to Strauss. Although Gladstone found the book able, honest and diligent, "(i)f I understand him aright he is a Unitarian, minus Miracle and Inspiration".

However,

I am one of those who think the Christianity of Frohschammer (as I have described it) is like a tall tree scientifically prepared for the saw by the preliminary process, well known to woodcutters, of clearing

<sup>48</sup> Strauss, *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*, German edition, p. 15; English edition p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, German edition, pp. 78, 117 and 135; English edition, pp. 86, 133 and 154.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, German edition, p. 113; English edition, p. 129.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, German edition, p. 143; English edition, pp. 163-64.

<sup>52</sup> *Das Neue Wissen und der Neue Glaube. Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung von D. F. Strauss's Neuester Schrift: "Der Alte und der Neue Glaube". Von J. Frohschammer, Professor in München, (Leipzig, F. U. Broadhaus, 1873), pp. 47, 142, 146, 162 and 190.*



away with an axe all the projecting roots, which as long as they remained rendered the final position impossible. This first process leaves the tree standing in a very trim condition, much more mathematical in form, as it is more near a cylinder, than its natural state. The business of the saw, when the horse and man arrive, is soon accomplished.<sup>53</sup>

A contrasting, final, example, of Gladstone's marginalia can be seen in his annotations to Ernst Haeckel's *History of Creation*. Gladstone agreed with Haeckel that most of the writings published in the 1860s and early 1870s for or against Darwinism "are the productions of persons entirely wanting in the necessary amount of biological, and especially zoological knowledge".<sup>54</sup> This study will re-evaluate Gladstone's engagement with science (see Chapter Four). This is usually perceived very negatively.<sup>55</sup> Thus, there is the oft-quoted example of Gladstone defending a classical education vis-à-vis a scientific one. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the 1860s asked Michael Faraday what was the use of electromagnetism; to which, Faraday replied, that he did not know but that one day Gladstone would be able to levy tax upon it.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the strengths or weaknesses his knowledge of the particulars of science reveal, his reading of Haeckel's book shows that Gladstone put the subject of science into the broader, cultural context.

Haeckel argued that divine creation or the work of a supernatural creative power had no connection to science; that where faith commenced, science finished. To which Gladstone has written in the margin "Oh No!"<sup>57</sup> Further, against Haeckel's positivistic epistemological assumption that "(f)aith has its origin in the poetic imagination; knowledge, on the other hand, originates in the reasoning intelligence of man", Gladstone has a mark of disapproval. To a similar comment later, Gladstone appended the response "all nonsense?"<sup>58</sup> A good example of a marked anti-empiricist trend in Gladstone's thought is shown by the following. Haeckel wrote: "We must not [Gladstone underlined] forget that human knowledge is absolutely limited, and possesses only a relative

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<sup>53</sup> Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, II, Popular edition, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> *The History of Creation: or the Development of the Earth and Its Inhabitants by the Action of Natural Causes. A popular Exposition of the Doctrine of Evolution in General, and that of Darwin, Goethe and Lamarck in Particular. From the German of Ernst Haeckel, Professor in the University of Jena. The Translation Revised by Professor E. Ray Lankester, M.A., F.R.S., Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, In Two Volumes, Volume 1*, (London, 1876), p. 3.

<sup>55</sup> For an example, see R. M. MacLeod, 'Resources of Science in Victorian England: the Endowment of Science Movement, 1868-1900', in P. Mathias, (ed.), *Science and Society 1600-1900*, (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 140 and 151.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in P. Jones, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Classics*, (London, 1999), p. 147.

<sup>57</sup> Haeckel, *History of Creation*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 20.

extension". Gladstone has written in the margin "But he does", intimating Haeckel's advocacy of monism. Finally, Haeckel has written: "In our late animal ancestors, all our so-called a priori knowledge, was originally acquired a posteriori, and gradually became a priori by inheritance". Next to this Gladstone, who has noted the passage, wrote "confusion?"<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, even from this highly selective and short discussion of Gladstone's marginalia one can gain a great amount of insight into Gladstone's immediate responses to a wide variety of reading. In some cases these can be contrasted and compared with his later written reflection to show a marked degree of consistency. This strengthens the original argument for using the marginalia as a supplementary source. Given that until very recently this evidence was neglected, there remains much scope for a detailed use of this in any study of the mind of Gladstone.

It only remains to outline the methodology and structure of this study. It is worth remembering that the topics chosen for this study were selected as a result of a detailed analysis of Gladstone's known theological reading as recorded in the Gladstone diaries from 1859-1896, (including the editorial footnotes). (During the course of research it became apparent that not all of Gladstone's theological reading is recorded in the diary; but there remained a most full record that enabled the selection of the topics.) From this the following table (see below) has been constructed, outlining the main development of Gladstone's religious reading in roughly chronological order.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.



<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
	Note: Reading on Darwinism all periods, intermittently. All periods: Homer, classics and ancient religion.
1859-1863	Catholicism - the Papacy. Marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Ritualism. The atonement and future judgment. A. P. Forbes, the Bishop of Brechin and the trial for heresy. The Anglican liturgy, revision and Holy Communion. 'Essays and Reviews' The Eastern Orthodox Church. The Pentateuch, the Old Testament and the Colenso controversy. Prayer book revision.
1864-1870	Catholic Church-Vatican council/infallibility. Ecumenism - Eastern Church. Ritualism. The Liturgy of the Church of England and Prayer book revision. The Colenso affair. Controversy over <i>Ecce Homo</i> . Eschatology.
1870-1875	The Athanasian creed and future punishment. The Vatican council - infallibility and Ultramontanism. The Purchas Judgment (Ritualism). Ecumenism - The Old Catholic Movement and the Bulgarian Schism in the Greek Orthodox Church. Spiritualism. Church Disestablishment.
1875-1880	Ritualism. Church of England Prayer book and liturgical rubrics. The Roman Catholic Church - infallibility and Ultramontanism. The debate over future punishment. The Eastern Church. Disestablishment versus establishment and the Royal supremacy of the Anglican Church.
1880-1885	The Bradlaugh affair. The Roman Catholic Church. Spiritualism. Ecumenism. Buddhism. Report of the Commission on the Ecclesiastical Courts. The Holy Eucharist, the liturgy and the revised version of the Bible as used in the Church of England. Ritualism. Ecclesiology.
1885-1890	Spiritualism. Roman Catholicism. Agnosticism and free thought. The Holy Eucharist. Buddhism. The debate over future life and punishment. The Book of Genesis-the creation stories and the Pentateuch. Debates over Mosaic cosmogony, evolution and geology as affecting the Old Testament. The beginnings of antagonism with T. H. Huxley. Colonel Ingersoll on Christianity. Church Disestablishment. Debates over Divorce. The English reformation, the Thirty-nine articles and the Elizabethan settlement of religion. Mrs. Humphrey Ward and 'Robert Elsmere'.
1890-1896	Biblical criticism, especially in regard to the book of Genesis and creation stories. Roman Catholicism - the Papacy. The English reformation and the Elizabethan settlement of religion. Comparative religion. The Controversy with Huxley over Biblical interpretation. Spiritualism. J. H. Newman. Much on Old Testament criticism. Agnosticism. Divorce. The Jewish question, especially in Russia. John Fisher, sixteenth century Bishop of Rochester. John Wesley. Disestablishment of the Church of Scotland. The Atonement. The works of Bishop Butler.

It will be seen that Gladstone's main theological concerns in later life can be categorised into roughly four areas:

1. The Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy.
2. The ecumenical movement, both in relation to Anglican re-union with Rome and contact with the Eastern Orthodox Church.
3. Unbelief and theological challenges to Anglican orthodoxy.
4. Liturgical issues.

Each of these could generate a study of its own; indeed, a number of such studies have appeared in the past. In this study the topic on unbelief and the theological challenges to Anglican orthodoxy was chosen and adapted to provide a basis for the analysis of Gladstone's later Christian apologetics. This enquiry was itself subdivided into the following areas:

- Future life and punishment.
- Science and the Mosaic Cosmogony.
- Inspiration and the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament.
- Unbelief and the philosophy of religion.
- The life of Christ.

These topics were chosen instead of Roman Catholicism, Ecumenism and liturgy because these issues (especially Roman Catholicism) are fully covered in the existing secondary literature. The subjects chosen were considered more likely to reveal unknown or understudied aspects of Gladstone's character. Furthermore, it was easier to delineate and obtain a manageable amount of evidence on these topics. Nevertheless, there is some discussion of the omitted subjects where their relevance seems to correspond to Gladstone's apologetics.

In building upon existing research this thesis will demonstrate a number of key factors in the study of the later Gladstone. It confirms Bebbington's thesis, in *The Mind of Gladstone*, in terms of the chronology of Gladstone's theological development.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Bebbington's study encompassed large non-theological areas of Gladstone's life. Consequently its attention to Gladstone's mature Christian apologetic, whilst prescient, is necessarily subsumed under its wider purposes. Therefore this thesis will expand and, where appropriate, modify Bebbington's examination of Gladstone's mature apologetics.

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<sup>60</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 307, for a summary.



However, it attempts to move beyond pre-existing investigations in one important respect. The hermeneutic key of this study is Gladstone's continued preoccupation with the nature of theological method. This, rather than merely his eventual position, is seen to be the most significant aspect of his later mind in general. Furthermore, this provides an opportunity to revise the overall picture of Gladstone as an intellectual in public life. Part One of the thesis outlines Gladstone's mature epistemology on which he laboured in public and private in the 1860s and 1870s. The second part shows this in action in a series of lively and controversial debates active amongst the clergy and the intelligentsia of late - Victorian Britain.

Overall this thesis will demonstrate that Gladstone's later Christian apologetic was both coherent and evolutionary. It is hoped that this study will complement and qualify that of Perry Butler by arguing against his central thesis that Gladstone's mature theological position had emerged by the 1850s, culminating in a form of Liberal-Catholicism that underwent no significant development.<sup>61</sup> Instead this study will show that Gladstone continued to absorb, mould and re-mould, through a critical dialectic, a number of broad religious and philosophical influences. Whereas Butler is correct in arguing that Gladstone reached a Liberal-Catholic position, this was not achieved until the 1870s and still underwent development after that date.

#### A note on Gladstone's general method of argument.

To attempt to discuss Gladstone's general method of research in a few lines is a daunting prospect. The subject could easily form a chapter in itself. The following is a short guide to the most salient forms of argument used by Gladstone in articulating and, especially, in defending his beliefs. The distinguished classicist, Hugh Lloyd-Jones, provides an excellent short description of Gladstone as a scholar:

Gladstone was a great man, but he was no great scholar and would not have been even if he had spent his life in universities. I do not mean simply that he was not a scholar of the kind Germans call 'ein Philologe'. Again and again he uses arguments that fall short of being proofs, concealing their weakness from himself as well as others by the siren charm and forcible persuasiveness of his lofty rhetoric...Fed upon the startling truths guaranteed to us by the authority of scripture, his imagination led him to embrace eccentric

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<sup>61</sup> Butler, *Gladstone. Church, State and Tractarianism*, pp. 233-35.

theories, sometimes recalling the oddest aberrations of seventeenth - century enthusiasts.<sup>62</sup>

Lloyd-Jones is, of course, referring to Gladstone purely as a Homeric scholar, but his description holds as a general comment on all of Gladstone's scholarly enterprises. The most important point to remember about Gladstone's method, when reading the following chapters, is that it was dialectical. At times this could be casuistical in its complexity.<sup>63</sup> Time and again the following chapters will make reference to Gladstone's dependence on Aristotelian terminology. This was taken particularly from the *Ethics*, such as the ideas of good, evil and pain.

The other mainstay of Gladstone's method was the use of analogy and probability as used by Bishop Butler, the eighteenth-century philosopher and moralist. Gladstone's use of this was never as straightforwardly uncomplicated as he always assumed. Indeed, assumption is an important part of his use of Butlerian ideas of probability. One has to be careful to ascertain whether Gladstone is using Butler's idea of probability in an "objective" or a "subjective" sense. Usually, it is the "subjective" sense, where "a sufficiently high degree of probability justified the belief of a reasonable person even without absolute certainty".<sup>64</sup> This distinction is not usually referred to in discussions of Gladstone's use of classical probability theory as reflected through the mind of Butler.

In many respects Gladstone shared the same way of working as the great Victorian sages Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman. Interestingly he did entirely share Newman's Butlerian influenced apologetic in *The Grammar of Assent*. Gladstone never considered Newman a true advocate and practitioner of Butler, as he told Sir Frederick Rogers in 1866.<sup>65</sup> Whereas Newman's idea of 'notional assent' in the *Grammar* roughly corresponded to Butler's idea of "subjective" probability, Gladstone would have had no time for Newman's idea of "real assent" because this was far too dependent on the individual's subjective reasoning.<sup>66</sup>

In other regards he shared ideas in common with Newman and, especially, Arnold. That is, for Gladstone the frame of mind resultant from original investigation was

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<sup>62</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Gladstone on Homer', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 3 January 1975, p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> A point never lost on contemporaries (especially Disraeli!), and historians.

<sup>64</sup> J. Smith, L. I. Berkove and G. A. Baker, 'A Grammar of Dissent: Flatland, Newman and the Theology of Probability', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 39, (Winter 1996), p. 144.

<sup>65</sup> Gladstone to Rogers, 25 February 1866, in D. C. Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone. Selected and Arranged by D. C. Lathbury*, Vol. II, (London, 1910) pp. 300-301.

<sup>66</sup> J. Holloway, *The Victorian Sage. Studies in Argument*, (New York, 1965), p. 7.



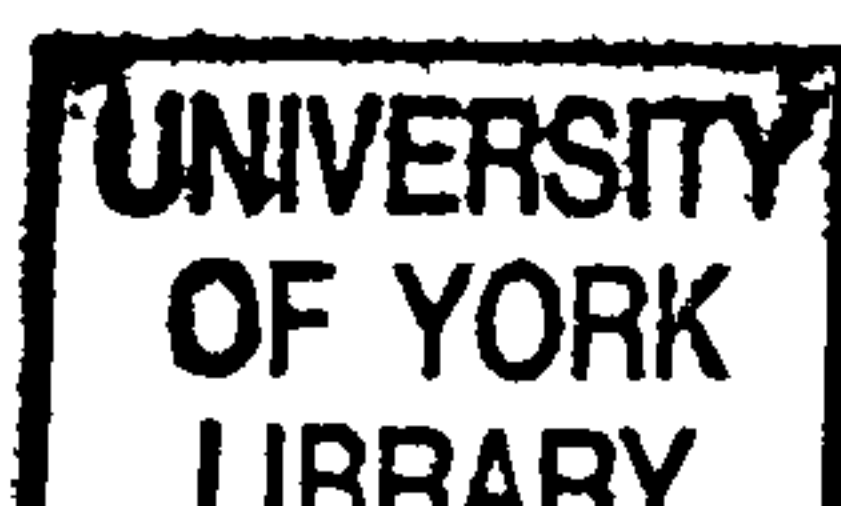
paramount. He always tried to show the contrast between thought that was sham and thought that was true. His guiding, Butlerian, principle was to examine widely and deeply the totality of life's experiences. Thus, this thesis will show that Gladstone used a variety of controversial methods:

1. *Argumentum ad hominem*.
2. The Socratic method of disputation.
3. Aristotelian forms of syllogism, especially the enthymeme.
4. The *tu quoque* – the rejection of the burden of proof.
5. The *petitio principii*.<sup>67</sup>
6. Enlisting the negative evidence to draw contrasts.

He was not always successful in these methods, of course, but he used them vigorously and unashamedly. One final point to consider is that Gladstone often used books that he believed had a penchant for arguments conducted on the lines of Butlerian methodology. It will be pointed out in the chapters below which books these were. Indeed, these chapters will show that certain books heavily influenced aspects of his thought on the various topics with which he engaged, which is why it is necessary to stress again the importance of his marginalia in this section on Gladstone's forms of argument.

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 166, 171, 174, 203, 209-12 and 214.



## **PART ONE. The Making of a Mature Apologetic**

## CHAPTER ONE. TOWARDS THE APOLOGETIC: THE INCARNATION AND THE MEDIATION OF CHRIST.

### Introduction.

The first two chapters of this study demonstrate how Gladstone reached his mature apologetical position. In stressing the importance of incarnationalism and the concepts of reserve, probability, sufficiency and analogy they will show how Gladstone, as an Anglican Churchman, moved from a pre-tractarian high church theology of the 1840s (yet integrating the influence of tractarian spirituality) to a position incorporating 'broad church' strands, and tending to a final position at the close of the 1870s of a liberal Catholicism. Such a trajectory was one of organic development and dialectical advance rather than one of simple linear progression. The hermeneutic key of the study, as outlined in the first two chapters, is Gladstone's continued preoccupation with the nature of theological method. It is in the way he worked out a position, rather than his specific conclusions (which will be seen to vary within a firmly determined range of opinions) that the most significant aspect of his later mind in general should be understood.

As this chapter is very much an introduction to the whole thesis, its structure is reflected by this purpose. The chapter begins by stressing the importance of the subject of the incarnation to Gladstone's thought and suggests why, paradoxically, there has been little study of this. Gladstone's lack of interest in Germanic higher criticism of the New Testament has led to little consideration by scholars of the subject of Gladstone's engagement with the incarnation. The surviving material for a discussion of Gladstone's views has, by and large, been neglected. Therefore, this chapter makes good use of Gladstone's domestic sermons that range from the 1840s to the 1860s.

The first part of the chapter shows how Gladstone worked out his own position on the subject of the incarnation. Gladstone privileged reverence towards the mystery of the incarnation. Christians ought to deploy appropriate reticence in relation to the incarnation. Gladstone, it will be argued, approached the incarnation through a combination of Aristotelian categories and the correct use of human reason in regard to the mystery of the incarnation. The omission of consideration by scholars of this topic, then, is seen as significant for an overall view of Gladstone's later apologetic.



The second part of this chapter explores Gladstone's dialectical cast of mind in relation to the inscrutability of the atonement, the need for modesty and the limits of human language. This is revealed by a discussion of Gladstone's engagement with controversies resulting from, variously, the Christological controversies of the early Church and the need to form an orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ; to analysing Gladstone's 1894 atonement article and its significance, and his 1868 appreciative review of J. R. Seeley's *Ecce Homo*. By exploring contemporary critical responses to Gladstone in relation to these two articles, further, significant, aspects of Gladstone's apologetical method are revealed.

Gladstone in commenting on 1 John 4:2-3, in a sermon of 1864, wrote that "Christianity is Christ, and Christ is the Eternal Son of God made flesh for us".<sup>1</sup> To deny this was to be in the spirit of anti-Christ.<sup>2</sup> Sixteen years earlier Gladstone had written,

If we have an idea or a doctrine which has a title to rank before all others in the Gospel system, or as may more perfectly be said, if there be a doctrine which more than any other draws the rest along and so may fitly be taken to represent the whole it is the doctrine of the incarnation...From this as from a commanding point of view we may look out forwards and backwards over the whole course of the Divine dispensation...It is the foundation of the whole doctrine of atonement.<sup>3</sup>

### Theory and Intellectual Method: Speculation and the Apologist.

The subject of incarnationism has not received the attention it merits in the intellectual development of Gladstone. A reason for this has to do with Gladstone's own neglect of the higher criticism of the New Testament. This has led scholars to ignore or undervalue the importance to Gladstone of the incarnation as a theological idea, which is all the more surprising since incarnationism is a cardinal point in much nineteenth century theology.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, f. 172. Whit. Tues. Epistle. Sermon, 4 February 1864.

<sup>2</sup> Gladstone was surely influenced by Robert Isaac Wilberforce who used the same phrase repeatedly. R. Wilberforce, *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature*, (London, 1850). Sermon of 10 March 1850, quoted in D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends. A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning*, (London, 1966), p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> GP Add Mss 44780 ff. 249-50. Sermon on Holy Eucharist, 19 March 1848.

<sup>4</sup> GP Add Mss 44446, ff. 177-78, T. H. Scrivener to Gladstone, 9 February 1875. It is true that it is extremely rare to find any correspondence purely devoted to the technicalities of New



The most sustained, and the most public, application of textual criticism of the New Testament by Gladstone is found in his 1857 article on divorce.<sup>5</sup> In this review the use of etymological and syntactical analysis is urged for a correct understanding of Christ's views on marriage and separation. Significantly Gladstone is aware of the difficulties encountered by exegesis scholars and theologians in reconciling the different teaching of the Synoptic Gospels with the fourth Gospel and the Pauline epistles. Gladstone's reasoning in this article reveals an important feature that will be commented upon in later chapters; that is, his reliance upon information gleaned from scholars together with a close analysis of the English text of scripture. He was not himself an expert in exegesis or hermeneutics. His view that the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke originated largely independently of one another was discredited by later nineteenth century research. Much of this was German scholarship, and the Gladstone diaries show that in the 1850s (and later) he was not engaged with a detailed study of the literary relationship between the Synoptic Gospels, or of what that relationship of each Gospel to the other might be.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it is unsurprising that in his review of John Seeley's *Ecce Homo* Gladstone is clearly uninterested in the current, German, scholarly debates on the Synoptic Gospels and the developing criticism of the fourth Gospel. In this review the then premier simply avoided the controvertible questions. These were purely irrelevant to his wider purposes on dealing with the life of Christ. He mentions Ernest Renan, for example, merely in order to use the testimony of S. T. Coleridge to counter the German influenced critical theses of the Frenchman's *Vie de Jésus*.<sup>7</sup> The argument is that because Gladstone had no interest in German scholarship in this area, there was a lack of interest in New Testament higher criticism.

Another reason for relative neglect may lie in the scarcity of sources on which to base a detailed analysis of the later Gladstone's views on Christ. In *The Mind of Gladstone*, David Bebbington has called attention to the importance of Gladstone's household

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Testament higher criticism in the surviving Gladstone papers. The above reference is the only major one located in the general correspondence of the Gladstone papers. It is on the definition of the Hebrew used in John 21.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Bill for Divorce', *Gleanings*, Volume VI, Ecclesiastical, pp. 60-79. Reprinted from the July 1857 issue of *The Quarterly Review*.

<sup>6</sup> J. C. O'Neil, 'The Study of the New Testament', in N. Smart, (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Volume III, (Cambridge, 1985), 143-78.

<sup>7</sup> W. E. Gladstone, "Ecce Homo". *By the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone*, (London, 1868), pp. 46-49. Hereafter cited as *EH*.

sermons, written during the 1840s to the mid-1860s, as a source for this topic.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, thus far, he is the only historian to have used this source. Together with an examination of Gladstone's Homeric studies, Bebbington demonstrates that increasing concern with human nature was indicative of Gladstone's thought in this period.<sup>9</sup> Echoing Jonathan Parry's scrutiny of Gladstone and religion in the 1860s, Bebbington draws attention to how the incarnation came to form a focal point of Gladstone's Christian worldview and how this shaped his subsequent intellectual development.<sup>10</sup>

(i) Mystery - the need for modesty in religious thought.

Under the subject of why Christ became incarnate and the perils of speculation on this, a significant theme emerges which Gladstone applied when discussing any doctrinal issue in later life. This is on the role of the theologian when encountering mystery in religion. This is why a study of the earlier Gladstone's thoughts on Christ is of such importance for his mature apologetic. This is in spite of the very unsystematic treatment of this subject by Gladstone.

In an extended essay (probably written in 1847) on Bishop Butler and the mediation of Christ, Gladstone identifies mystery in religion as something that must be confronted before any study of Christ can begin. Religion is shrouded in mystery that both transcends our intellectual capacities and contains moral problems for which we lack the appropriate moral integers. These could be used as a positive objection to the divine affinities. Such difficulties, however, "prove nothing except the limited range of our faculties and raises no presumption whatever against the author of revelation"; therefore, they provoke none at all against our reception of the revelation of God. "When nothing can be inferred from the mysterious character of a doctrine, except negatively in regard to our own incapacity, we should not be forward or eager in our attempts to obtain a solution".<sup>11</sup>

In any communication of an infinite being to a finite one, especially to such as we who are deeply tainted by the impurity of sin, it is natural to expect that we shall both

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<sup>8</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone. Religion, Politics and Homer*, (Oxford, 2004), pp. 89-97 and 133-39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapters 6 and 7, pp. 142-215; and D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and Homer', in D. W. Bebbington, and R. Swift, (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool, 2000), p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, See also J. Parry, *Democracy and Religion. Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 153-81 and 411-52.

<sup>11</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, ff. 175-92, But(ler). Mediation, f. 175. Watermarked 1838. Probably written 5 September 1847. See diary entry for that day and Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 133.



receive and understand such revelation little by little. This is because we cannot comprehend the complete picture of such teaching, and as we struggle to fathom each component part we are bound to encounter confusion and difficulty. This is compounded by our sense of pride and by our failure or inability to place completely our dependence upon God and “walk by faith in the consciousness that our sight will be enlarged as the advancing state of the heart and will make such enlargement wholesome”.<sup>12</sup>

Gladstone, in dealing with religion in general at this point, used Butler’s *Analogy*, part 2, chapter 4 [should we give up scripture if it seems unreasonable? However, we cannot speculate unnecessarily upon the scheme of God for which we lack the facts and experience], to argue that we must not allow any antecedent probability of moral solecisms in a revelation (e.g. the atonement of Christ) to cast doubt upon the morality of doctrine and the moral laws recognised by the general and permanent assent of mankind.<sup>13</sup>

“If therefore attempts are made to show the existence of such moral solecisms in the scheme of the Gospel, labour may be usefully disposed in disproving it. And we must not confound such attempts at explanation or solution of mysteries. Or must we be dissatisfied with it because it does not accomplish what it never undertook, that is to say, if it simply removes the apparent objection, without supplying the positive materials of explanation of the whole doctrine...”<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, Gladstone engaged in a great deal of arcane conjecture (within the limits discussed at the beginning of this chapter) on how rational it is to believe that Christ the unspotted Lamb, without taint of sin, could both progress in divine favour and how this could possibly be of benefit to us who are qualitatively different in that we lack Christ’s sinlessness.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, how is it possible to have real growth or increased goodness in a being created completely good? Gladstone argues that such a being was Christ in His human form. We know that Christ was conceived without sin, “but yet except for something extrinsic (so to speak) to itself, except for Him who assumed it, it was capable of falling into sin”. The Lord Jesus Christ was in his earthly sojourn in state of developmental probation: “the flesh which he had taken underwent a real and oh how searching a trial,

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 176.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 177.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 177.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, GP Add Mss 44728, ff. 175-92, c.1847, Butler and Mediation. Also the memorandum of 10 December 1893 at GP Add Mss 44775, f. 256.

not the less real because its issue was certain on account of the Might that dwelt within it and by degrees raised its power to the same celestial height as that on which its purity had stood at the beginning".<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, Christ in respect of his humanity had a constant access to and increase of goodness by suffering and pain, "schooled by the steps of an ineffable and lifelong discipline".<sup>17</sup> This increase of good, although due to an essentially extrinsic force of His humanity, was concurrent with His divinity.<sup>18</sup> This divinity imparted to His humanity an analogous perfection. However, this perfection, stressed Gladstone, was imparted through the ordinary laws and processes of nature. It was not something extra to Christ's human life, but an integral part of the mystery of the incarnation.<sup>19</sup>

How marvellous, therefore, that Christ suffered through being tempted, for through this he made himself the accessory of our experience, (see Heb. 2. 17-18).<sup>20</sup> That which Christ knew on account of his blazing omniscience he condescended to come to know through other channels: in the form of the physical sensations of a human body and the faculties and affections of a human soul.<sup>21</sup> This does not contradict Christ's omniscience through his Godhead; rather, it enabled this Godhead through its human incarnation to be subject to entirely new experiences. This included experiencing pity (Heb. 4.15). It is true that as an omniscient, omnipotent judge Christ could already have possessed the experience of pity towards humanity. But the feelings we have when confronted by temptation and the desire to succumb can only really be experienced and felt by those who have come into contact with them.<sup>22</sup> The point Gladstone wished to accentuate above all else is this,

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<sup>16</sup> GP Add Mss, 44728, ff. 185-86, memorandum on Butler and Mediation, c.1847.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 186.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 186.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 187. See also sermon of 12 March 1854, "Our Lord's Temptation" [GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 77-78]. "As God His nature was incapable of sin: as a Man His nature was not when He assumed it itself incapable of sin, but only by virtue of its union with the Godhead". Such was our nature in Adam before the fall; such is our nature in Christ as He is born into the world. The difference lies in the way this nature was used. The first Adam stained and destroyed its purity; whereas the second Adam kept the innocence of His humanity unstained, its rectitude exact and its integrity unimpaired.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon of 12 March 1854, ff. 77-78. In submitting Himself to temptation Christ was fulfilling an intrinsic part of His earthly mission. It was to repair, in His own person, the consequences of Adam's fall. As the second (perfect) Adam, Christ by His vicarious atonement could subsequently transmit His reparation to humanity - thereby reversing the results of the life of the first Adam. Yet as in Christ's life of trial, recovery is not and cannot be affected at a stroke but takes a lifetime of struggle.

<sup>21</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, f. 188, memorandum on Butler and Mediation, c. 1847.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 188-89.



Christ could not have been the Head and in the members, He could not have been the Eldest Son among many brethren, we could not have [been] grafted into Him and made one with Him unless He had conformed to all the conditions of our life without exception save only that one condition in which we were to renounce ourselves and be conformed to Him, namely our sinfulness"<sup>23</sup>

Here, then, is an extremely important point to remember. According to Gladstone, the incarnation of Christ remoulded or re-patterned the living relationship of the Trinitarian Godhead from *within* that Godhead itself.<sup>24</sup> The incarnation is an episode in the life of God and a necessary one. Unless God had become incarnate "our reasonable nature could not have been the object of Divine sanctification by that specific process which had been appointed for that work, namely by our feeding on the Redeemer, receiving His pure and immortal essence into ourselves, and by the force and virtue, and sweetness of what we so receive subduing and rejecting every adverse element and bringing the whole man into a willing captivity, and an uniform occurrence founded on similitude".<sup>25</sup>

It may be objected, however, that if so much suffering produced so much good in Christ why might not more have produced a proportionate increase of good and thus increase the worth of the atonement? To which, replied Gladstone, we cannot know the limits in any given case of the relationship between suffering and improvement. It is likely that the constitution of human nature itself must in some manner, as yet undisclosed, and to us in this life irresolvable, fix a limit. "And if the awarding of suffering to the innocent, with a recompense, is not of itself unjust, neither does it become so from the circumstances that such suffering is made the means of bringing about the acquittal of the condemned".<sup>26</sup>

In this respect it is interesting to note that behind the defence of Christ's suffering in the atonement lay a complicated and esoteric use of Aristotelian categories on the degrees and types of pain and the primary and secondary senses of pleasure and pain. Since Gladstone was content to have such reviews republished by the Clarendon Press in 1896 they obviously held a lifelong attraction.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 189.

<sup>24</sup> See GP Add Mss 44744, f. 188, memorandum by Gladstone, c.1851-54.

<sup>25</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, ff. 189-90, memorandum on Butler and Mediation, c.1847.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 191-92.

<sup>27</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 327-33.

This is because good is not the essence of pleasure nor pain the essence of evil.<sup>28</sup> Pleasure, as in Aristotle's *Ethics*, is the proper supplement of virtuous action and pain, equally, the supplement of evil action. Nonetheless, such categories, according to Gladstone, needed modification in our present, post-fall, moral dispensation, (which is a disturbed and abnormal state of affairs).<sup>29</sup>

Even so, these terms of pleasure and pain are to be viewed with Aristotle "as powers which have no essential character or evil attaching to them but a relation and a contingent one".<sup>30</sup> They have only the power of attenuating or exhausting (not originating) moral qualities that previously exist. Therefore pain is only to be avoided when it is not connected with the production of good. This does not preclude the idea of a voluntary infliction of pain by a man upon others or upon himself for the purposes of discipline.<sup>31</sup> Hence, Gladstone can then go on to argue that the pain, suffering and death of an innocent, but willing, Christ is no evil, but, in fact, the reverse. It is the perfect example of obedience through goodness, and a growth by goodness. As seen above, this was Christ in his human nature.<sup>32</sup> That which Christ knew (absolute goodness and perfection) in his blazing omniscience he came to know through other channels. This was through his human body and the emotions and faculties of a human soul.<sup>33</sup> Two memoranda on future life and punishment dating from 1864 and 1873 (see Chapter Four on this subject below) show how Gladstone applied these Aristotelian categories to terms such as 'finite', 'infinite', 'eternal', and 'death' in addition to punishment and pain. All of this formed part of Gladstone's continuing preoccupation with the limits of human language to express divine truth.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the Aristotelian analysis by Gladstone, the objection to Christ's vicarious suffering and atonement is removed if it is remembered that pain is, as seen above, capable of ministering to good as well as evil. As it does minister to good "it draws upon itself by association a colour and a character of good as often as it does so minister". It is not an injustice to consent to pain if the result is one of goodness, even if

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<sup>28</sup> GP Add Mss, 44728, f. 180, memorandum on Butler and Mediation, c.1847

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 181-82.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 182-83.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 182-84.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 184-85. See Luke 13.32, John 17.19, Heb. 2.10 and Heb. 5.8-9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 188.

<sup>34</sup> GP Add Mss 44753 ff. 157-82, 14 November 1864 and ff. 361-497, July - August 1876. Two memoranda on future life and punishment.



the person who suffers is innocent.<sup>35</sup> To one person the action of Christ will be of atoning efficacy. To another it will renew and perfect already existent, but dormant, energies. In the first instance Christ is the agent and the person the recipient. In the latter case both Christ and we are Subject. To Gladstone a combination of the two is an integral position of Christian faith.<sup>36</sup> Although these thoughts were connected in Gladstone's writing on Bishop Butler and mediation, there is, in fact, only a slight connection with Butler's thought in the manuscript itself. Support for Gladstone's arguments can be found in Butler, but the primary philosophical inspiration is beyond doubt Aristotelian.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Butler's argument in the *Analogy* is very Aristotelian at this point.

(ii) Gladstone's approach to the mystery of the incarnation.

Unsurprisingly, then, Gladstone repeatedly accentuated the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ.<sup>38</sup> A concurrent emphasis in the thought of Gladstone is placed on our inability to enter the mind of Christ or fully comprehend the precise manner (or more correctly the mechanics) of the atonement. This is a position to be found in some of Gladstone's earliest surviving sermons. A sermon written for Trinity Sunday 1840 saw Gladstone expostulate on "...the unspeakably gracious mystery revealed to us in the scripture, of One God in three persons".<sup>39</sup>

Preaching on John 1.1 in a Christmas day sermon, he says that the passage may be taken to signify the 'festival of the incarnation' - an insurmountable mystery for us, but one of the great foundation stones of the Catholic faith. Rather than regarding it as a dilemma to be overcome, Gladstone exults in this mystery. For the first verses of the Gospel of John show that, at the very first point of time, the Saviour existed as the *Logos*.

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<sup>35</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, f. 191. Memorandum on Butler and Mediation, c.1847.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 192. See undated memorandum of c.1851-54, GP Add Mss 44744, ff. 185-90.

<sup>37</sup> Gladstone, *WJB, I, 'Analogy'*, pp. 65-67, 74, 88, 91, 116-17, 11, 123 and 233-244. Butler argues that life is a discipline of vice to the majority. Thereby it is enhanced as a discipline of virtue to the good. Pain is a discipline (I) to make us that which we were meant to be (II) to make us what we are to be and (III) to enable us to achieve what we would do. Later in the section on Christ as mediator Butler argues that repentance alone being enough to extirpate guilt appears contrary to the general sense of mankind. Having already stated that life is a period of moral probation and pain has a legitimate part to play in this, Butler states that speculation on the exact metaphysics of the atonement is uncertain and verges on the absurd. In addition to being beyond what scripture authorises it breaks the first rule of inductive logic.

<sup>38</sup> This clearly mirrors views later published in H. E. Manning's Fourth volume of sermons, where Christ is repeatedly viewed as the mystery of the incarnation as well the redeemer and restorer of mankind. See J. Pererio, *Cardinal Manning. An Intellectual Biography*, (Oxford, 1998), pp. 80-85.

<sup>39</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 66-69, Sermon, Trinity Sunday, 14 June 1840.



This is an unknown that humanity is incapable of comprehending, but one for which trust in scripture provides the answer. For

the saviour is the Word, not written, not limited to human language, not dead, not finite, but which was in the beginning, which was in the beginning with God, which was God, which partook of His Essence, which was one with His Substance, which had life and power and the source of spiritual action in Himself, which was a person and not a thing, which was not a manifestation of the mind of God, but was the very mind of God.<sup>40</sup>

In another Trinity Sunday sermon Gladstone wrote that the incarnation as mystery should not be attended with any practical difficulty. For everyone's very existence is a mystery; that of the incarnation should not perplex the sober-minded and intelligent Christian. In fact, some of the greatest intellects of humanity have wholeheartedly, and with joy and thanks, embraced this mystifying idea.<sup>41</sup> Given this, however, what role did human reason or speculation have to play in examining the mediation of Christ?

Gladstone did not answer this in any systematic way, if by that is meant a detailed and coherent theological treatise. Even so, by scrutinising his reading and manuscript notes a two-fold answer can be suggested. On the page opposite the flyleaf of p. 785 of the second volume of Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu*, Gladstone has marked "Speculative Christology-atheism surely!"<sup>42</sup> Here is, firstly, one of the major themes of Gladstone as theologian: the need to ascertain proper intellectual limits of speculation in dealing with the revelation of God. It is a refrain returned to again and again as later chapters will demonstrate.

The incarnation of Christ was a subject to be approached with deep awe and spiritual reverence: the most gigantic work of love by God. In one sermon Gladstone notices how Christ illustrated his own condition not by reference to man (as might have been expected) but by allusion to the animal creation. "The King of all the Angels was not only as the servant of all men, but had not even the servant's portion, it was among the brutes that he must seek for apt subjects of comparison with humiliation like his". Such

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 183-84, Sermon, Christmas Day, c. 1841. Note Manning's emphasis on 'substance' in Tractarian thought. See the Fourth volume of *Sermons*, (London 1850), pp. 184 and 186.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 124, Sermon, Trinity Sunday, 6 June 1841.

<sup>42</sup> *Das Leben Jesu, Kritisch Bearbeitet von Dr. David Friederich Strauss*, (Tübingen, Verlag von C. F. Osiander, Volume II, 1839). From Gladstone's personal, annotated, copy at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden.



was the respectful attitude that should be adopted towards "the Son of Man, the Man of Men, God manifest in the flesh".<sup>43</sup>

Referring to John 19.27 enabled Gladstone to state that it may be beyond our limited powers to comprehend the precise manner in which the incarnation of Christ was made manifest in our stage of finite time. All we can know is that it was expiation, a sin offering and propitiation. "But in these things that have been said of the sacrifice of the Son of God...they only set it forth to our poor eyes in part and in one or another of its aspects. It remains a mystery, but a sweet and consoling as well as a profound mystery".<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, he could comment, by elaborating upon the Athanasian Creed,

it is perfectly true to say that our Lord Jesus Christ was a perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting: and yet this is a very small part of the truth concerning the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, who besides being perfect man is also perfect God and equal to the Father as touching his Godhead. And when we presumptuously separate these several portions of the same divine truth which God has knit together, the result which we exhibit is not truth, but untruth, just as the limb of a man were it torn from his body if it be called a man, is falsely so-called<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, although the Incarnation may be a mystery, we can know something of it. In two sermons, separated by some twenty-one years, Gladstone engaged in contemporary Christological controversies contrasting the Catholic Church's teaching with fourth century Arianism, modern Unitarianism, and contrasting beliefs that denied Christ was truly man. Against those who would demote Christ to a secondary place or see his life as merely one of example,

the whole of the Epistles in which they have expounded the Christian faith exhibit Jesus Christ, not only in particular texts and passages but throughout, as supreme in his divine nature as the object of worship, as having the title of God and all the attributes thereto belonging: and in this character is also the centre of the Christian system upon which the whole depends.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 13-14, Sermon, 2 Sun Trin, 17 June 1849.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 159-60, Sermon, Good Friday, 3 April 1863.

<sup>45</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, 131, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 16 March 1845.

<sup>46</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, f. 125, Sermon, Trinity Sunday, 6 June 1841.

To deny this, whether outright or as a result of the fruit of inappropriate speculation was to be in the spirit of anti-Christ. This very phrase had also been used by Robert Wilberforce in a sermon of 1850 on the sacramental system, citing the same scriptural reference of 1 John 4:2-3.<sup>47</sup> Thus, through theological engagement we can see that Gladstone did endorse a method of knowing about the mystery of the incarnation.

As well as demonstrating some of the roots of his thought it also exhibits Gladstone as part of a common tractarian devotional culture. In one of his university sermons, John Henry Newman wrote in a similar vein about faith as a law of dutifulness in its search from the known to the unknown, animated by the light of heaven. Faith "is perfected not by mental cultivation, but by obedience".<sup>48</sup> Owen Chadwick, in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* comments upon how this doctrine of reserve typified Tractarianism in the writings of, apart from Newman, John Keble, Edward Pusey, William George Ward and Isaac Williams.<sup>49</sup>

Later, Gladstone would go on to defend Seeley's *Ecce Homo* on theoretical grounds. In regard to the theoretical Gladstone posed a number of questions,

Can no work which confines itself to approaching the character of our Saviour on its human side, have its just and proper office in the Christian teaching of this or any period of Christian experience? Or would it be too bold to assert, in direct opposition to such an opinion, that, while such a mode of treatment is open to no insurmountable preliminary objection, it was eminently suited to the religious experience of modern times? Further still. If it be well accommodated to the needs of the time in which we live, does it purchase that accommodation by the sacrifice of anything which more permanent needs would require? Does it involve a departure from the spirit of the original and great *Evangelium* of the Gospels themselves? Nay, does it involve a departure from their very form?<sup>50</sup>

Granted that the central idea of the incarnation was the veiling of the glory of the Lord in human flesh and that Christ came as "the consuming heart of the Divine presence ... but in the still small voice", to assimilate the Word into the heart and mind of all men it is neither wrong nor unorthodox to dwell on the moral aspects of the

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<sup>47</sup> Newsome, *Parting of Friends*, pp. 375-76. Using Wilberforce's 1850 volume of sermons, *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature*.

<sup>48</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, (London, 1960), p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, See also chapter on unbelief where Gladstone uses similar Aristotelian ideas of approximation, a secular version of the doctrine of reserve.

<sup>50</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 22-23.



incarnation.<sup>51</sup> The whole work of the Incarnate Word was moral and spiritual renovation. This was through energising and transforming a pre-existent, if latent and deformed, morality.<sup>52</sup>

The schema of *Ecce Homo* was entirely in accord with the portrayal of the character of the Lord and Saviour in the Gospels, especially the Synoptics.<sup>53</sup> These presented a progressive picture of Christ with an emphasis on his human life, ethical teachings and miracles. The providence of God left it till the later writings of Scripture and the early Church to enunciate a doctrinal and abstract description of the Incarnate Word.<sup>54</sup> Like the Gospels, the writer of *Ecce Homo* is content to stress the more immediate, non-metaphysical Christ and to dwell on his humanity. For that is, first and foremost, the Christ of the Gospels.<sup>55</sup> The approach of Seeley's work is directly analogical to the process of Christ's methods and teaching.<sup>56</sup> The very function of Christ as mould, matrix or pattern was to lay "the foundations of a morality for transcending the rarest and the best among the rare or the good of what had yet been delivered to mankind". (See Mark 1. 2-22; Matt 4. 17 and Luke 4, 18-19 and 21.)<sup>57</sup>

Gladstone summed up as follows,

It appears, then, on the whole, as respects the Person of our Lord, that in its ordinary exhibition to ordinary hearers and spectators, was that of a Man engaged in the best, and holiest, and tenderest ministries, among all the saddest of human miseries and trials; of one teaching in a word, too, the best, the holiest, and tenderest lessons; and claiming, unequivocally and without appeal, a paramount authority for what He said and did; but, beyond this, asserting respecting Himself nothing, and leaving Himself to be freely judged [like the picture given in *Ecce Homo*] by the character of His words and deeds.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, in principle, the author of *Ecce Homo* simply followed the didactic method of the Lord himself in his ordinary and usual method of proceeding: that is, he approached him from the human side and dealt with him as a man.<sup>59</sup> Take, for example,

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39 ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-55

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-12.

Seeley's discussion of Christ's temptation<sup>60</sup> or the revelation that Christ grew in stature and favour with both God and man,<sup>61</sup>

And thus the revulsion in our minds, upon the first perusal of such words, will have been a proof of, not their irreverent use, but of our too narrow acquaintance with the great truth of our Lord's humanity, and will itself have been a discipline for which we have to thank our author.<sup>62</sup>

Once fully conscious of the holiness and sympathy of Christ's humanity, it was natural to progress to the Divinity of Christ. Even Gladstone, however, noted that on its own *Ecce Homo* was unable to supply the movement.<sup>63</sup> Clearly, its author had more work to do, but with that so far accomplished Gladstone was in entire sympathy.<sup>64</sup>

Gladstone believed, like Newman, that the natural and proper consequence of thought in regard to faith was yielding oneself to the truth of Christ. To confess Christ as the Emmanuel is simply the result of a journey of obedience. Appealing to the great early Church councils and Church Fathers (who established "with clear and luminous expression the true doctrine concerning the person of our Lord"),<sup>65</sup> Gladstone ends an 1864 sermon (the year after Renan's *Vie de Jésus*), with the following,

Thus the first severe trials of the Church in her warfare with this world were in vindication of this great truth. In these days of controversy, strife, superstition and unbelief, in which very few people are qualified in what is called the philosophy of religion we must still acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and is a

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<sup>60</sup> GP Add Mss 44408, ff. 249-50, Sir Henry Holland to Gladstone, 22 December 1865. Holland, in contrast to Gladstone, regarded Seeley's description of the temptation as ingenious rather than ingenuous. He comments on the unorthodoxy of *Ecce Homo* in this respect. Like Pusey, he compares Seeley's treatment to that of Renan - in particular his style of reasoning, (see ff. 270-71, Holland to Gladstone, 30 December 1865). In Gladstone's annotation of Gribble's *The Gospel for the Nineteenth Century*, (London, Third Edition, no date, but sent by the author), the statesman marks his approval ('IV') of Gribble's approval of Seeley's handling of the temptation. Gribble (p. 34) argued that Christ's consciousness of his full divinity was only made apparent to him by the temptation, and was the special gift of his ministry, only, thereafter.

<sup>61</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 112-14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14 and 114.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2 and 9. See also Pusey Papers, Liddon Bound Volumes, Volume II, Gladstone to Pusey, 1857-1881, ff. 403-04, 6 January 1868. Gladstone wrote to Pusey to tell him that his support of *Ecce Homo* was not unqualified, and that the volume contained references which he found jarring.

<sup>64</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, p. 200.

<sup>65</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 172-73, sermon, Whit Tues, Epistle, 7 February 1864.



light to enlighten all and a guide to our journey into the holy and happy land that lies beyond.<sup>66</sup>

The views discussed above reflect the mind of Gladstone largely beyond the limits of the present thesis. All the same, they clearly resemble his mature reading and musings on the subject. In a later memorandum written around the late 1880s or early 1890s, Gladstone wrote on “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood”. Even at this late stage Gladstone is reluctant to answer the question he has set himself: “How does our Saviour’s work wash us and make us whole?” To which he answers, “There is one explanation which I name only to put aside. There is a mass of sin in the world, against which is contend[ed], as in a book, a certain amount of punishment. This punishment may however it is said be taken over like a debt by an innocent person willing and able to bear it. Such a person is Christ”.<sup>67</sup> As shown below when Gladstone did begin to speculate (however tentatively) on the mechanics of atonement, many reviewers accused him of the heresy of socinianism.

The rejection of improper speculation as applied to the atonement can also be seen in Gladstone’s reading on this subject. In a work by the Rev. Joseph Gilbert, Gladstone placed two marks of disapprobation on attempts by the author to hypothesize on the nature of Christ’s atoning efficacy.<sup>68</sup> Further marks of astonishment appear when Gilbert writes that no matter how intense, a moral motive can never become a physical power or vice versa (even in God). More puzzlement is displayed when Gilbert argues that although God’s physical power is supreme, his moral administration cannot be likewise said to overcome every possible obstacle in its immediate effect. On being emphatic that in regeneration there can be no increase in moral energy, Gladstone wrote, “Is there none in heaven?”<sup>69</sup>

In another volume on the atonement, Gladstone marked the following passage strongly, “When we take the phrases of a court of law, and allow them to describe what has passed before the divine tribunal, we must carry along with us a sense of their

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 175.

<sup>67</sup> GP Add Mss 44792, ff. 255-58, undated (c. late 1880s to early 1890s) memorandum on the subject of Christ as the Lamb of God.

<sup>68</sup> *The Christian Atonement; Its Basis, Nature or Bearings; Or, The Principles of Substitution Illustrated, as Applied in the Redemption of Man, By the Rev. Joseph Gilbert*, (London, 1852), pp. 63-64. Gladstone has marked ‘X’.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97. Gladstone has marked ‘!! !!’

inadequateness for that higher use".<sup>70</sup> This is referring to the use of Roman legal terminology (*acceptilatio*) to describe the precise manner of Christ's death and justification. The author quotes St. Anselm saying "For I do not seek to understand, that I may believe; but I believe, that I may understand". Next to this Gladstone has written, "So S. Aug".<sup>71</sup> Gladstone again marked emphatically his approbation of the following comment: "But there is some danger in applying thus strictly and logically the notion of satisfaction for a debt, to a transaction so mysterious, so far above all comparison with men's dealings".<sup>72</sup>

Thus, if speculation could be dangerous then Gladstone thought he did well to emphasise this. This emerged most clearly in an undated memorandum bearing the watermarks of 1851 and 1854. Human language is like an elastic gas carrying thought upwards and outwards. In dealing with the relationship between the human soul and the divine life in Christ such language becomes so strained that even the most recondite thought cannot express its illimitable and incommensurable quality.<sup>73</sup>

Divine revelation has no 'language' of its own, but must work through human thought patterns. Hence it is easy to see the intrinsically figurative quality of so much of our cognisance of the divine. It is no wonder then that we struggle to express the relationship between two perfect natures in one person. "It is to suppose the co-extensiveness of our intellectual and moral faculties with those of the inhabitants of Heaven, and even of the Almighty Himself". Language is essentially an abjuration of reality, an auxiliary to the expression of truth. Furthermore, it is an attenuation, but not an exaggeration, of truth.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *The Atoning Work of Christ, Viewed in Relation to Some Current Theories. In Eight Sermons, Preached Before the University of Oxford, in the Year MDCCCLIII. At the Lecture Founded by the Late John Bampton, M.A. Canon of Salisbury. By William Thomson, M.A. Fellow and Tutor of Queen's College, Oxford*, (London, 1853), p. 135. Gladstone has marked 'II'.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167. Gladstone has marked 'II'.

<sup>73</sup> GP Add Mss 44744, ff. 185-86, Undated, c. 1851-1854, memorandum by Gladstone.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, Gladstone also notes this in marginalia in his reading. See, for example, G. Vance-Smith, *Some Modern Phases of the Doctrine of the Atonement Exhibiting its Obscure and Uncertain Character*, (London, 1894), pp. 12 and 27 ff [Gladstone has marked 'II']. See also R. W. Dale, *The Atonement, The Congregational Union Lecture for 1875*, (London, 1875), p. 18 [Gladstone has marked 'IV'] and T. Cooper, *The Atonement and Other Discussions. Being a Second Series of "Plain Pulpit Talk"*, (London, 1880) p. 34 ['IV'] and p. 226 [ma - on Cooper claiming the virtues of Christ as the epitome of the gentleman]. All these marks indicate Gladstone's agreement with the above authors, namely that one cannot define the actuality of the atonement and the universal Church has never dogmatically propounded a definitive theory of the atonement. Hence, the worthlessness of febrile but vacuous speculation.



This did not prevent Gladstone from considering the nature of (at least to his own satisfaction) the atonement vis-à-vis Christ's relationship with the Father.<sup>75</sup> The essential point was that such theorising must never be taken as undoubted fact. If it is so taken, it could lead to the espousal of propositions on Christ's mediation that appears contradictory and premature. For any unaided human thought on such subjects can only ever be "at most the approximation of the great indivisible truth". At the end of his essay he fears whether he has forced radically anthropomorphic ideas onto the divinity, but concludes that this idea is necessarily involved in any concept of sacrifice to God in Christ.<sup>76</sup>

Some preliminary conclusions are as follows. Gladstone's dislike of theological speculation is, or can be viewed as, a personal application and development of the tractarian doctrine of reserve. This is most apparent when the views of Gladstone are seen next to those of, for example, Robert Wilberforce. Writing on the incarnation Wilberforce is blunt: "In inquiring into the counsels of God, our wisdom is not to go beyond what is written...the more reverent course is to confine ourselves to the mere consideration of what He has revealed, without venturing to fathom His unsearchable counsels".<sup>77</sup> For both Gladstone and Wilberforce such an attitude does not preclude developing revealed truth to tease out hidden meanings or re-emphasize key aspects of doctrine that may need restructuring for contemporary application. Hence for Gladstone the approval of *Ecce Homo* and the repeated accentuation on the essential mystery, in metaphysical terms, of the Incarnation. The remark in his annotation of Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* that speculative Christology is atheism is an indication of Gladstone's dislike of the intrusion of rationalism or random philosophising in religion. It is not an outright abandonment of the use of reason in religion. However, as with remarks on the use of figurative language in Christology and the stress that one cannot enter *in toto* the mind of Christ, it gives weight to the proper, subservient, place of reason in revelation. Reason is, at this stage, being refracted through Aristotelian lenses as the influence of Gladstone's Oxford education is still in evidence.

The significance of Gladstone's view of development within the Incarnate Word (to be shown in detail below) built upon his view on the proper place of deduction in religion. The Gospels, The New Testament Epistles and the Church Fathers all illustrated

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<sup>75</sup> GP Add Mss 44744, ff. 187-89. Undated, c. 1851-54, memorandum by Gladstone.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>77</sup> Wilberforce, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 235.

that the incarnation is the basis of the atonement. Moreover, that the crucifixion is not, independently, the method or process of salvation.<sup>78</sup>

Traces of early Christology find resonance within Gladstone's theology. One strand of patristic thought, designated 'Word-man' by J. Kelly, was founded upon the Aristotelian hypothesis of man as a psychophysical unity. This postulated that in Christ the Word was united with a true human being; such a being possessed of a human soul as well as a human body.<sup>79</sup> Gladstone qualified his espousal of such views by reiterating the need for them to be firmly established in a scriptural framework. Nevertheless, this is a good example of practical Aristotelianism by Gladstone. This is a basis of beginning from what is known (or in this instance revealed by God) and progressing to a limited, if legitimate and distinct, perception of the religious reality of the case. This is diametrically opposed to the approach of a Strauss or a Renan in substituting philosophy or idealistic romanticism for revelation and using this as the springboard from which to originate esoteric hypotheses. That is Gladstone saw as legitimate the use of an established, but modest, philosophical foundation in apologetics, one that should be grounded in a form of scholasticism not modern Hegelianism.

As a result, for Gladstone correct *method* in the study of religion was important, as rightly determining the content and meaning of revelation itself. In Gladstone's mind this conclusion had a wider appeal than the doctrine of the incarnation, as later chapters will show. This can be seen as an important contribution to the debate on the role of the clergy in Gladstone's thought pointed out by recent biographers.<sup>80</sup>

### Incarnationalism: Its Importance for Shedding Light on Gladstone's Mature Apologetic.

A useful way of seeing the importance of incarnationalism in the development of Gladstone's later apologetic can be approached through the following questions. What are the implications for Gladstone in viewing Christ as the mould, matrix and perfecter of humanity? What do his views on the development of Christ as the Incarnate Word reveal

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<sup>78</sup> Another Pauline influence. The idea of Christ's resurrection as 'first fruits', 1 Cor. 15.

<sup>79</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fourth edition, (London, 1968), p. 281; H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, (London, 1952), p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 65 ff and p. 238; Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, p. 86.



of the importance of individual and social development in Gladstone's thought? What do his views of *Ecce Homo* signify of his mind in the 1860s, the base upon which the superstructure of his mature apologetic was laid?

(i) The purpose of the incarnation.

At various times Gladstone reflected on the deeper moral and religious implications of why the Son of God had to become incarnate in the human form of Jesus. He treads carefully on such a delicate subject. For this matter deals with the very heart of the divine attributes, and has to deal with the thorny difficulty of the relationship of Christ to sin and temptation. As seen above, he argued that for the Godhead - the three in one Trinity - the incarnation was a new experience. Within the Godhead the incarnation enabled God to demonstrate a perfect and considerate judgement of our fallen humanity, from direct experience as a human being. For example, to experience and to feel the temptations of our human life as a human as well as God.<sup>81</sup> Supposition of this kind is rare for Gladstone and, as in this case, usually based on explaining the meaning of a particular passage of scripture. Nonetheless he was content to publish an essay in 1896 that contained views on this subject first written in 1830. This demonstrates the paramount importance in Gladstone's cast of mind of the relationship of Christ to human nature.<sup>82</sup>

This Christocentrism in Gladstone's thought shows that he possessed, at times, a 'broad-church' emphasis on the non-dogmatic, especially in his spirituality as opposed to his philosophical theology. Ecclesiologically Gladstone was and remained 'high-church' (but not ritualist) to the end of his life. Still there is more than an echo of the sermons of Thomas Arnold in those of Gladstone, despite the marked tractarian influence of Pusey and Robert Wilberforce.

This amalgam of influences is seen most forcibly in the way Gladstone often strikingly portrays the humanity of Christ. Christ may have been the 'captain of our salvation' (a phrase used especially by Pusey), but he was also humanity's 'sympathising friend', the treatment of one of Arnold's sermons. This and the theme of the deep love of God in Christ are important Pauline themes. They also figure notably in Gladstone's

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<sup>81</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, ff. 187-88, Memorandum on Butler and mediation, 1847.

<sup>82</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 327-33. Again this is on the connection of Butler's *Analogy* and Christ's atonement.



sermons forming a common cultural thread with other early and mid-Victorian theologians.

This is not to suggest that Gladstone adopted an Arnoldian theology. Nonetheless, by placing Gladstone's views in context with the wider intellectual climate of the mid-Nineteenth Century we can see that he was able to accommodate various (proto-) broad-church strands into his thought. This is displayed, for example, in Coleridge's and Arnold's emphasis on the supreme value of truth in religion which had clear moral implications for the whole of life. Like Gladstone, Arnold stressed Christ as the head of society. Both showed a dislike of arcane theology<sup>83</sup>, which led to illegitimate discoursing on God and the divine attributes, a common theme in Coleridgean idealism also.<sup>84</sup>

When, therefore, Gladstone discussed the need to see Christ's atonement as a sin offering, this was efficacious only because such a person, the sympathetic friend, could make a sin offering for us.<sup>85</sup> For Christ did not withdraw from the common life of man but only from the evil it contained. Therefore, for this very reason, "the spirit of the Gospels is human and genial, binding us to give no needless offence, to estimate others with mildness, to cherish the sense of human brotherhood, to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep, to be made all things to all men for the greater glory of God".<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> T. Arnold, *Miscellaneous Works*, (London, 1845), pp. 12 and 295-96. "God...hiding Himself altogether from the sight of natural knowledge, reveals himself only as a part, if I may speak of our knowledge of man; first as the fountain of all our duties, and so the perfection not of our natural knowledge but of our moral, and secondly in that great truth of Christian revelation, that as man alone he is to be known, or is in any way comprehensible". Gladstone, as shown in this study, provides a much greater role for knowledge of God through natural law. But the sentiment of a God not fully revealed to man and therefore the requirement to conduct thought about the deity with due reserve is a theme shared by Gladstone. See T. R. Sanders, *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement*, (New York, 1972), originally published in 1942, pp. 110, 111 and 117. Also T. Copley, *Black Tom. Arnold of Rugby. The Man and the Myth*, (London, 2002), pp. 188 and 201.

<sup>84</sup> Likewise Coleridge saw Christianity as 'life' and not a theory or speculation. Although much of Coleridge's theology was developed using speculative reason, he was against lawless speculation. Coleridge used Kant to distinguish between speculation or theoretical reason (abstract truth) and practical reason (moral truth and the will of man). Coleridge placed primary emphasis on the practical reason: reason serving as a guide in the life and activity of the whole man. The chief evidence for truth was whether it worked in and through man's whole being and life, not whether it satisfied his logical faculties. Here is a route through which Gladstone, without specifically adopting it, could accommodate his thought with philosophical idealism. Sanders, *Coleridge and the Broad Church Movement*, pp. 28, 29, 33-34, 38-39, 47-49, 51 and 60. Also, T. E. Jones, *The Broad Church. The Biography of a Movement*, (Lanham, 2003), pp. 32-34.

<sup>85</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 66-69, Sermon, Trinity Sunday, 14 June 1840

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 20, Sermon, First Sunday of Lent, 8 March 1840.



In one sermon Gladstone contrasts the life and work of Christ with the Law of Moses, stressing the teaching of St. Paul in 2 Cor. 3: 4-10. Here the law that is written on the fleshly heart of Christ - his whole work and gift to man - is the living and transforming power of holy love and obedience.<sup>87</sup> Gladstone highlights the riches of the mercy of God in Christ. He is a kind of divine magnifying glass into which we see through to know ourselves so that we can come to know the length, breadth, depth and height of the love of God for us.<sup>88</sup> The entire incarnation was 'a gigantic work of love' that Christ undertook freely for our salvation.<sup>89</sup>

Even his temptations were a lesson of love for us. This was no isolated or exceptional part of the ministry of the Incarnate Word. The difference between the temptation of Adam and that of Christ is that the Saviour kept the innocence of his humanity unstained, his rectitude exact, his integrity unimpaired. "Was this all he did? Oh no: had this been all, then indeed he had wrought for Himself but not for us. He came to submit the humanity he bore to such a process of fiery discipline - as might place it altogether beyond the power of the tempter. He took it, as we may say, like polished silver, but He left it like Gold which nothing can tarnish".<sup>90</sup>

In a memorandum of the same period, the early 1850s, Gladstone stressed

Love is assuredly the first principle of our religion. First ethically: because it is this power which carries us forth from ourselves and fastening our affections upon others is the root and condition of all community and life. And first theologically: for is it not the first action of our faith to believe in God? And when we believe Him, in what do we believe? I answer we believe in love: for 'God is love'. We do not believe in justice, power or wisdom: though He in whom we believe be all-just, all-powerful, all-wise: but we believe in love because God is love, and has Himself pointed love out to us as the innermost (so to speak) and central principle of his Being...<sup>91</sup>

This hints at a fluidity of views on the incarnation between Tractarianism and broad-church theology. Such a fluid emphasis was typical of the tractarian Robert Wilberforce, whom Bebbington and Newsome regard as the nearest the Oxford movement came to possessing a systematic theologian. Wilberforce devoted a whole

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 275-79, Sermon, Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, 9 October 1842.

<sup>88</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 85-89, Sermon, Season of Lent, First Sunday in Lent, 25 February 1844.

<sup>89</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 13-16, Sermon, Second Sunday of Trinity, 17 June 1849.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 77-81, Sermon, First Sunday in Lent, 12 March 1854.

<sup>91</sup> GP Add Mss 44740, f. 165, Memorandum by Gladstone, 3 October 1852.

section of his *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* to this idea. One of the specific roles of Christ incarnate was his perfect sympathy with human nature. This enabled him to enter completely into all human suffering, physically, mentally and emotionally because of the uncorrupted freedom of his universal and perfect human will and sympathy.<sup>92</sup> In a Good Friday sermon Pusey similarly noted that Christ as model is a perfect incarnation of love.<sup>93</sup>

Gladstone, therefore, was far from alone in laying emphasis on these very 'human' themes of the incarnation. Yet it would be remiss to ignore the parallels with Thomas Arnold who, in his sermons on Christ the friend, also dwelt on Christ's deep sympathy for our human nature. These sermons also highlighted Arnold's personal devotion to Christ.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, this inclination towards a non-dogmatic, inclusive prominence on the incarnation was not limited to the earlier period of Gladstone's life, although it certainly had its roots there. It also demonstrates that historians should not, as is usually the case, overlook Gladstone's review of *Ecce Homo*.

(ii) The hidden Christ of the Gospels.

One aspect of the incarnation as portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels is, as seen above, the fact that their primary concern is not with the divinity of Christ. Moreover, Christ himself concealed the dignity and divinity of His person. In particular, Christ refrained from discoursing in public to the people at large on such dogmatic subjects. This was reserved for the small band of Apostles, the meaning of which<sup>95</sup> was not fully apparent until after the resurrection.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, Christ's healings, exorcisms and other miracles were largely kept secret or only told to a few chosen friends (e.g. the healing of the daughter of Jairus, Matt. 9.25 and Luke 9. 51, 58). Indeed, Christ's use of supernatural power was perhaps, in the first instance, simply to demonstrate the love of God and

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<sup>92</sup> R. I. Wilberforce, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ in its Relation to Mankind and the Church*, (London, 1848), pp. 4 and 81-109.

<sup>93</sup> E. B. Pusey, *Sermons from the Church's Seasons. From Advent to Trinity, Selected from the Published Sermons of the Late Edward Bouverie Pusey*, (London, 1883), Sermon 21, Good Friday, pp. 287-90.

<sup>94</sup> T. Arnold, *Sermons*, Volume III, (London, 1845); Sermon I, 'Christ our Friend', pp. 4, 7, 9 and 11.

<sup>95</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 58-65.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-108.



produce in people the conviction that Jesus was a teacher of God granted great power and authority, (see the speech of Nicodemus, John 3.2).<sup>97</sup>

Gladstone viewed it as eminently reasonable that Christ should have veiled his majestic and divine power. For, had he not done so, the more modest, but more significant and authentic, display of divine love would have been eclipsed.<sup>98</sup> All supernatural occurrences recorded in the Gospels were to demonstrate Christ's character of love, pity and unending and tender care.<sup>99</sup> Christ's parables (such as the sower, the vineyard, the master of the house and the talents) did undoubtedly testify that the man Jesus was of a rank wholly different and above that of a teacher of God, however holy.<sup>100</sup> Yet even these messianic stories have a veil interposed. "The truth is there; but it ceases to thrust itself upon the mind, and stands rather as the reward to be obtained in after-thought". Thus, Christ does not so much teach of Himself, as prepare the way for the teaching of Himself.<sup>101</sup>

The secondary importance of miracles as proof of Christ's divinity and the argument that these miracles were mainly works of love appear in several late sermons. In chapter three I shall argue that Gladstone defended the rationality of miracles by using Butlerian arguments against Humean ones. By doing so he did not place a foundational defence of the rationality of Christianity upon the miraculous. This was also secondary in Gladstone's grammar of belief.

In *Ecce Homo* the life of Christ is seen chiefly as one of precept and only secondarily one of miracle. "I speak of its external development in the light of man: for inwardly it was above all a life of prayer, wrestling and deep communion with God. The lives of the great men of this world are full of action: but action such as theirs the life of Our Lord presents nothing. He made no war nor peace, no government, no law, no revolution, no work of art or thought: He did not strive nor cry and His voice was not heard in the streets". As for the precepts, the issue in *Ecce Homo* was plain - the destruction of sin and the return to God. How limited in value were his miracles in comparison to his precepts! Elsewhere Gladstone claimed that the primary, indeed intrinsic, value of Christ's miracles was "a glorious and splendid manifestation of the

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-75.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

removal of human want and woe" (e.g. Matt. 11. 4-5).<sup>102</sup> Gladstone used the more doctrinal Gospel of John to stress how Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah over the lame, the blind, the lepers etc... The destruction of the sentence and consequence of sin in this life brought about by the miscarriage of Adam lay in the annihilation of human misery. Christ saves, in the first instance, neither by his teaching nor even his actions, but by his actions combined with obedient suffering.<sup>103</sup>

In 1894 Gladstone continued to reiterate Christ's message of love as exemplified in the parables. Clearly this theme had persistent merit for the elderly statesman. The parables, analogous to that of Nathan teaching David in the Old Testament, were a divine instrument of mercy. These were "ingeniously devised" so that no stone was left unturned, no mind left untrained for the recovery of the soul. Gladstone does not deny or diminish the worth of the other collateral reasons of Christ's decision to teach in parables (e.g. those in particular stressing the eschatological coming of the Kingdom of God). Notwithstanding, these contingent truths were kept in abeyance by the divine plan until after the resurrection. The great message of the Gospels needed to come to fruition first.<sup>104</sup> Gladstone uses the idea of the 'messianic secret' to argue that if Christ had not pursued this course, he would "have stirred into activity that animosity of the ruling class, which was destined to put a close to His blessed ministry".<sup>105</sup>

(iii) Christ: the pattern man

Another prominent theme of Gladstone's analysis of Christ and human nature was to view Christ as the pattern, mould or matrix of man, the restorative second Adam. This favourite phrase of the tractarians had a firm scriptural foundation in the epistles of St. Paul. This was also a common element in early and mid-Victorian theology as can be seen by a number of works published bearing the title.<sup>106</sup> One of the sermons of Thomas

<sup>102</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 122-23, Sermon, Second Sunday after Trinity? 16 October 1859. See also, ff 124-27, Sermon, Epiphany, 23, 24 October 1859.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermons of 16, 23 and 24 October 1859.

<sup>104</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, ff. 47-48, undated memorandum by Gladstone, probably early February 1894 as it is completed by a separate memorandum dated 11 February 1894.

<sup>105</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, f. 49. Memorandum dated 'F.11.94'. This is a continuation of the memorandum cited in footnote 104.

<sup>106</sup> This idea is found in numerous sermons: 18 March 1840; 17 April 1840; 3 May 1840; 13, 14 June 1840; 6 June 1841; 9 October 1842; 25 February 1844; 31 March 1844; 27 October 1847; 19 March 1848, 17 January 1849; 1 April 1855; 16 October 1859; 23 October 1859; 28 April 1861; 7 February 1864 and 9 April 1865. Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 331; Gladstone, *EH*, p. 65 ff; 'True and False Conceptions of the Atonement', 1894. Reprinted from the Nineteenth Century, *Later Gleanings. A New Series of Gleanings of Past Years. By the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, Theological and*



Arnold is called 'Christ our Pattern' and the idea is essential to late medieval devotional works on Christ by St. Bonaventure and Thomas à Kempis.<sup>107</sup> Gladstone's diary shows that he read the latter work *On the Imitation of Christ*, unsurprisingly, throughout his life.<sup>108</sup> Wilberforce and Newman also refer to the idea by demonstrating that it had strong patristic support. The idea of Christ as mould or pattern of our humanity lay behind a memorandum of October 1849 where Gladstone noted how the incarnation was a fulfilment of the theology of the Psalms. For example, Psalm 1, in describing the 'good man' without reserve, can only take its full meaning in the person of Christ as the second Adam.<sup>109</sup> All of this reinforces the tendency in Gladstone of thinking between categories of churchmen rather than being rigidly based in one branch of Anglicanism.

Several ideas lie behind Gladstone's use of the terms mould, model, pattern or matrix. In connection with the present subject, however, a crucial idea emerges, namely that the representativeness and ideal humanity of Christ shows the corporate nature of Christianity and the idea of sociality.<sup>110</sup> That is of incorporation into the body of Christ and the restoration of union with God. Christ is our elder brother and this, as shown below, was to have very important implications in the thought of Gladstone. Writing to

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*Ecclesiastical*, Second edition, (London, 1898), pp. 312-37 especially p. 322 ff. See also, memorandum of early February 1894, GP Add Mss 44476, ff. 47-48. This idea is central to the concept of Wilberforce's *Doctrine of the Incarnation*. Roderick Strange in *Newman and the Gospel of Christ*, (Oxford, 1981), emphasises its key nature in the Christology of the Anglican Newman, pp. 52-4. The idea often crops up in Gladstone's reading. See the works referenced in this chapter of Gribble, Thomson, Hall and St. Bonaventure.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, (Gladstone's annotated edition of) *The Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. From the Latin of St. Bonaventure. Newly Translated for Use of Members of the Church of England*, (London, 1854). This edition was signed by F. E. (=Frederick Oakley). Often the work of à Kempis was used as a reference to Christ as a pattern, such as in the edition published in 1815 of an earlier one by John Wesley: *The Christian's Pattern: or, A Treatise of the Imitation of Christ. Written Originally in Latin by Thomas à Kempis; Compared With the Original and Corrected Throughout by John Wesley*, (London, 1815).

<sup>108</sup> The following is list of post-1860 references to à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*. The list is longer than that given by Matthew in the index to the Gladstone diaries. 26/8/(18)60; 19/9/60; 21/4/61; 14,18/4/62; 4/5/62; 6,7,8,/2/63; 4/11/64; 31/5/68; 12/9/69; 19/9/69; 18/12/70; 27/8/71; 31/3/72; 22/9/72; 15, 17,/2/74; 22,29/4/74; 22,29/4/77; 3/2/78; 13,20/4/79; 14/12/79; 12/1/80; 21, 25, 28/3/80; 4/4/80; 23/10/87; 19, 25, 30/2/88; 6, 20, 27/1/89; 3, 10, 17, 24/3/89; 7, 14/7/89; 22/10/89; 22/3/91; 14/2/92; 1/5/ 92; 11/6/93 and 30/7/93.

<sup>109</sup> GP Add Mss 44737, ff. 84-98, memorandum by Gladstone dated 1849, watermarked 1847-8.

<sup>110</sup> See the following sermons especially. GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 18-21, 8 March 1840 (on the temptation of Christ); ff. 30-33, 17 April 1840 on the crucifixion); ff. 66-69, 14 June 1840 (on Trinity Sunday); 44780 ff. 249-50, 19 March 1848 (on the Holy Eucharist-Incarnation); 44781, ff. 13-16, 17 June 1849 (on the Second Sunday of Trinity); ff. 120-127, 16, 23 October 1849 (on the Trinity and the Epiphany); ff. 128-33, 28 April 1861 (Easter Sunday); and ff. 172-75, 7 February 1864 (Whit Tuesday-Incarnation).



his eldest son William in 1854 on how to develop useful intellectual habits, he comments on the incarnation

St. Ignatius, a very early martyr, astonished his pagan persecutors by declaring that he...bore his Redeemer within him. That sublime privilege, however, he did not mean was his alone; it is common to all the faithful. For, says St. Paul, we are members of His flesh, and of His bones. We are incorporated into Him, and fed by Him - by Him who, though man, yet sits upon the throne of the universe. It is, then, no common destiny to which we are born.<sup>111</sup>

In his review of *Ecce Homo* Gladstone linked this idea with his other intellectual concerns to show the wider relevance of his studies on the incarnation. According to Gladstone, the idea of Emmanuel or God made man and with us did not only emerge with the birth of Christ. The Jews had possessed such an idea by oral tradition, prophecy and scripture. The pagan Greeks had this idea in the principle of anthropomorphism. By the time of the Advent, both ideas had become corrupted: "the form or matrix was itself deformed" and the idea depraved and debased. For example, in the Jewish nation at large this idea had become politicised and nationalised in the hope of a human messiah and liberator. With regard to the gentiles the old theanthropic mythology had become so corrupt and corrupting that it had ceased to be a religion at all.<sup>112</sup>

"A space was to be bridged over, and it was vast: but where all the piers, and every foundation stone of the connecting structure, were to be laid in the common sense, in the history and experience, of man".<sup>113</sup> Thus, aside from the work of love, the work of salvation, Christ Incarnate - as the head or representative man- was to bring about a true social revolution in the affairs of humanity. This was to be a restoration from anarchy to order, to reconstitute society upon the original foundation of obedience to the Father and correspondence to His will. Unlike destructive human social reform, the transformation of Christ's mission was to be tender, careful and considerate of all that was in the world. It was to respect that which was entitled to respect and to endure "with loving patience all evils which could only have been removed at the cost of introducing still greater

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<sup>111</sup> Gladstone to W. H. Gladstone, 22 October 1854, in Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion by William Ewart Gladstone. Selected and Arranged by D. C. Lathbury*, Volume II, (London, 1910), pp. 154-55.

<sup>112</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 30-37.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



evils".<sup>114</sup> As we saw above, Christ, as the true meaning of humanity was greater than all the men of the world added together.<sup>115</sup>

There is an implication here between Gladstone's incarnationalism and his belief in Peelite etatist intervention and an example of the trend Hilton, Bebbington and McLeod and others have identified as the basis of mid-Nineteenth Century incarnational politics. Hilton has placed Gladstone still in the framework of atonement-based politics where an evangelical sense of providence tended to *laissez-faire* economics combined with a collective concern for moral welfare. However, it is equally possible to say that Gladstone's views were based on social incarnationalism combined with a stress on individual responsibility. In this sense only does Gladstone share common ground with Lord Morpeth (later the Seventh Earl of Carlisle), whom Hilton contends exemplified Liberal Anglican politics.<sup>116</sup>

An appreciation of the true meaning of Christ's humanity was vital for Gladstone to combat those who claimed that in Christ the Godhead took precedence over or (somehow) eclipsed His humanity, so that He was not a real man or pattern. At the same time, Gladstone needed to assert that Christ was not only a man but "the Eternal Son of God made flesh for us".<sup>117</sup> Conversely, Gladstone was at his most tractarian, devotionally, in arguing that the Church is the continuation on earth of the incarnation. That the sacraments (especially the Holy Eucharist) are the channels by which our body and soul is incorporated into the true pattern man. "(T)hat through the medium of brotherhood in His humanity we may partake of the Divine life and so again return to the glorious image in which our first parents were created. It is through Union with Christ in His flesh that we receive the training of the Sons of God...Here is the master key of religion, here is its central truth: repentance, faith, justification, sanctification. What are they but the several stages in the process by which the fallen flesh of Adam's children is remade and glorified by union with the pure and Holy manhood of God Incarnate".<sup>118</sup> Thus "God has appointed our Pattern man whom we are all to follow,

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>115</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 120-23, Sermon, Second Sunday of Trinity, 16 October 1859.

<sup>116</sup> B, Hilton, *The Age of Atonement. The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*, (Oxford, 1985) and 'Whiggery, Religion and Social Reform: The Case of Lord Morpeth', *The Historical Journal*, 37, 4, (1994) 829-859. D. W. Bebbington, 'Religion and Society in the Nineteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 32, 4, (1989) 997-1004. H. McLeod, 'Varieties of Victorian Belief', *Journal of Modern History*, 64, (June 1992) 321-337.

<sup>117</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 123-26, Sermon, Trinity Sunday, 6 June 1841 and 44781, ff. 172-75, Sermon, Whit Tuesday, 7 February 1864.

<sup>118</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, f. 174, Sermon, Whit Tuesday, 7 February 1864.



even the Incarnate Son, and as the Incarnate Son Himself underwent a sharper discipline, to bring his humanity to a higher perfection (*sic*), so must his followers".<sup>119</sup>

Continuing to highlight the humanity of Christ, Gladstone often refers to the second person of the Trinity in his capacity as 'the man of sorrows acquainted with grief', the servant of God who suffered a shameful death on our behalf.<sup>120</sup> Typical of this seam of thought is the following passage from a Palm Sunday sermon of 1844:

In an obscure country he was obscure. In a world and a life of sorrows, He was pre-eminently sorrowful. He had no beauty nor comeliness to the fleshly eye - nor has he now any. His words, the words of eternal life uttered from his lips, had no music to the carnal ear, and the carnal heart still remains barred against their entrance. He did battle during His life on earth with the indifference and enmity of man, with the adverse powers of Satan and his Angels.<sup>121</sup>

In spite of this Christ was without blemish or spot. The events of Palm Sunday (usually used to emphasize Christ's universal majesty and divinity) "were singularly illustrative of that union of humiliation and grandeur which characterised the earthly sojourn of the Redeemer".<sup>122</sup> We can barely, or not at all, comprehend the weight of suffering in Christ in Holy Week. We know from scripture that its depth and horror was beyond our comprehension.<sup>123</sup> These ideas stayed with Gladstone until the end of his life. They resurfaced in his 1894 atonement article and his 1896 *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*.<sup>124</sup> Nearly fifty years earlier he had written in a private memorandum that Christ could not have been the head and we the members, he could not have been the eldest son among his many brethren, we could not have been grafted into him and made one with him, unless he had conformed to all the conditions of our life without exception save only our sinfulness. "Having the same feelings of our temptations as we have: having in Himself steeled and tempered our common nature to endure that feeling and to repel and overthrow what caused it: He is our true pattern to which we can draw near

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 132, Sermon, Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Easter, 28 April 1861.

<sup>120</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 42-45, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 3 May 1840; ff. 93-96, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 31 March 1844; ff. 249-50, Sermon, Holy Eucharist, 19 March 1848; 44781, ff. 13-16, Sermon, Second Sunday of Trinity, 17 June 1849; ff. 93-96, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 1 April 1855; and ff. 120-23, Sermon, Second Sunday of Trinity, 16 October 1859.

<sup>121</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, f. 93, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 31 March 1844.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 94.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 95-96.

<sup>124</sup> Gladstone, *Atonement*, especially pp. 322-25 and *SSB*, pp. 327-33.



and be made like. He can take us up into Himself and present us to His Father shielded and shrouded with the glory of his righteousness".<sup>125</sup>

In contrast to the many American and English thinkers of the Nineteenth Century who wrote of Jesus in a spirit of idealistic liberalism and/or philosophical theology, Gladstone instead focussed on the humanity of Christ from within a firmly Catholic theology. In many respects he echoed ideas found in the thought of Newman and James Martineau.<sup>126</sup> This involved the concept of personalism: in persons and personal relationships is the highest that life has to offer to be found. As in Martineau, the person of Christ Himself can be seen as a revelation of God for Gladstone - not only the revelation of God's will to man but a revelation of the possibilities of humanity (although within a strictly orthodox doctrinal framework). The precepts and actions of Christ are important; however, the deepest and most morally valuable aspect of the divine in Christ was His very person.<sup>127</sup>

For Gladstone this was no liberal Protestant idea of Jesus as an archetype (or *Urbild*), found, for example, in the platonic theorising of the liberal doyen Friederich Schleiermacher. Instead it was one firmly entrenched in patristic and Catholic thought.<sup>128</sup> It was also anchored in what Sue Zemka characterises as the anthropomorphic orientation of nineteenth-century thought.<sup>129</sup> In contrast with such eminent Victorians as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Florence Nightingale, Gladstone's stress on the co-existence in one person of the human and divine in Christ is not a symbolic replacement of scripture, but rather a reinforcement or fulfilment of it.<sup>130</sup>

(iv) Christ and the divine plan of progressive religious education.

It is within this focus on Christ and human nature that another prominent theme emerges. Gladstone also saw Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, as part of a preordained divine plan of progressive religious evolution. This is discussed further in the chapter below on Biblical inspiration and the analysis of Gladstone's Homeric studies and his 1887 article *Universitas Hominum*. Nowhere is this theme of progression more evident

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<sup>125</sup> GP Add Mss 44728, f. 189. Memorandum on Butler and Mediation, 5 September 1847.

<sup>126</sup> Strange, *Newman and the Gospel of Christ*, especially pp. 134-56.

<sup>127</sup> H. Weinel and A. G. Widgery *Jesus in the Nineteenth Century and After*, (Edinburgh, 1914), pp. 186-91.

<sup>128</sup> J. F. Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus. The Search for Christ Through Writing in the Nineteenth Century*, (Aldershot, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>129</sup> S. Zemka, *Victorian Testaments. The Bible, Christology and Literary Authority in Early Nineteenth-Century British Culture*, (Stanford, 1997), pp. 64 and 102.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 129 and 188. See also Keuss, *Poetics of Jesus*, pp. 101 ff, 164 and 197-200.

than in the development of the person of Christ. There are two ways of viewing this aspect of Gladstone's thought. The first is to highlight the fact that the crucifixion or the defining moment of Christ's atonement is not the completion of salvation. Instead it is part of a process in which Christ's resurrection and ascension have crucial roles. Furthermore, and secondly, there is the view that Christ did progress in holiness or grace. This is at least as far as his humanity is concerned. Christ's relationship to sin and with God the Father took on an especial importance for Gladstone. This dynamic process at the very nucleus of the Christian religion was intimately connected via the incarnation to each and every person and to the Church as a whole. Gladstone, then, embraced a definite idea of progress both in religion and society. This was not the result of an undogmatic liberal protestant viewpoint. On the contrary it was embedded in the catholic and sacramental theology of tractarian thought. This in turn was heavily moulded by the primitive Church and patristic thought.

Taking the theme that the crucifixion is not the end of salvation, Gladstone repeats this throughout his life. This in no way implies a diminution of the importance or centrality of the atoning death of Christ in the mind of Gladstone. In one of his last sermons he dwells on 'the hour of the Lord' at the start of Holy Week. Even this, however, is seen within the metaphor of a ripening seed. Christ's work could only be of benefit when it had attained the full measure of its ripeness. This it could only accomplish through the supreme effort of the holy and obedient will of Christ to undergo, (without sensible consolation of the Father's inward presence, or his own divine strength) the pain, shame and solitude of his passion and death. Thus "something was accomplished for us by His death which was not accomplished by His life".<sup>131</sup> In a private memorandum of (ca.) 1854, Gladstone stresses that, "the one full perfect and sufficient sacrifice" of the death of Christ on the cross is finished. It can never be repeated and admits of no comparison or addition, its sufficiency comprises its perfection. This is not the end but simply the beginning of a new process.<sup>132</sup>

Gladstone nevertheless makes more noticeable the distinction between the cross and the resurrection. In an early resurrection sermon the point is clearly made: the crucifixion of Christ delivers us from the punishment of sin whereas the resurrection represents our deliverance from the sins, which had merited such punishment. The latter

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<sup>131</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 184-87, Sermon, Palm Sunday, 9 April 1865.

<sup>132</sup> GP Add Mss 44744, f. 190. Undated memorandum by Gladstone. Watermarked 1851 and 1854.



release is the greatest since the most spiritual. The cross frees us from pain, the resurrection from the wrath of God. In other words redemption or salvation is progressive. Not only does Christ begin a new life at the resurrection but we too as partakers of the incarnation through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Both the cross and resurrection show that Christ "educated it [our human nature] from the perfection of childhood, which consists in absence of spiritual guilt and fault, to the perfection of mature age which consists in the full conscious reflection and determined surrender of the whole man, with all his ripened faculties, to God".<sup>133</sup> The cross and resurrection form two axes of the single process of salvation. The significance of the atonement lies within that scheme. The redeeming work of Christ remains incomplete but ongoing and progressive so long as sin and sorrow remain in the world. "Where Christ died for our sins, He had still to rise again for our justification".<sup>134</sup>

In 1894 when writing on the atonement Gladstone still stressed the essential difference between pardon and justification and the fact that these are both evolutionary situations. Indeed the believer receives only an initial justification in the atonement. In order to bring this within the saving grace of the Gospel one needed to personify it organically. That is, work it out day by day so that the preliminary remedial process is not intercepted and cut dead. A living seed of righteousness that is capable of growth, under the laws appointed in nature for this purpose by God, is essential before pardon can be transmitted.<sup>135</sup> This is fundamentally the message of the Gospels. By way of example, Gladstone uses the curing by Christ of the sick young man recorded in Matthew 9.5. "Was there here an *opus operatum*, which by means independently of his free will made the man thereafter a morally different man from what he had been before? Or did not the absolving act of our Lord imply and correspond with a movement belonging and residing in the interior of the man himself?"<sup>136</sup>

These views on the cross and resurrection (that had continued currency until the end of Gladstone's life) are very similar in thought and language to that of Pusey and Robert Wilberforce. In an Easter sermon on Romans 4.5, 'Christ, Risen, our Justification',

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<sup>133</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 34-37, Sermon, Easter Sunday [Resurrection I], 19 April 1840. Perhaps this is a hint of why Gladstone though not over impressed with Frederick Temple's essay in *Essays and Reviews* saw no need to criticise or speak out about its similar themes on the progressive education of the race under divine superintendence. See the chapter on Inspiration and especially the appendix.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 110-111, Sermon, Good Friday, 9 April 1841.

<sup>135</sup> Gladstone, *Atonement*, pp. 327-28.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.



Pusey preached a progressive redemption: "As truly, then, as the death of Christ was the true remission of our sins, though not yet imparted to us, so truly was his Resurrection our true justification imparting to us the efficacy of His death, and justifying us, or making us Righteous in the sight of God".<sup>137</sup> Pusey went on to highlight how we must partake of this efficacy by the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity through the special channels of the sacraments. Christ must come to us and be in us to make the precious gift of the atonement apply to us.<sup>138</sup> Wilberforce in his 1850 *Sermons on the New Birth of Man's Nature* taught the fact that Christ's death and resurrection each imparts a distinct efficacy in the plan of salvation. We must share this through union with Christ in his Church and sacraments.<sup>139</sup> A strong tractarian element remained with Gladstone all his life.

Gladstone continued to stress the progressive nature of Christ's atonement by highlighting the importance of the period between the resurrection and the ascension. In his *Ecce Homo* articles he writes on the significance of this period for Christ. This is a new revelation of God, for the events of the Pentecost and apostolical commissions reveal a proof "not of dissonances in the Divine counsels, but of a harmonious and accepted progression in their development, and thus of their essential and steady oneness of design".<sup>140</sup> Indeed, it was only in the forty days between the resurrection and ascension that Christ finally informed his innermost circle "...of all the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts 1.8). For the kingdom is the appointment of a new dispensation in the life of man - a brotherhood - as well as the recognition of the headship of Christ in this dispensation. To Gladstone it seemed that this teaching needed to be stored and

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<sup>137</sup> Pusey, *Sermons*, p 329.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 330-33.

<sup>139</sup> Wilberforce, *Sermons*, pp. 20, 21, 23, 138 and 175. Sermon XIX. See also his *Doctrine of the Incarnation*. Here there are the ideas (1) the progressive nature of Christ's suffering and (2) that the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice rests upon an active participatory relationship with the faithful, pp. 102 f, 143, 217, 312, 364, 426, 434 and 499. Such views find clear echo in Gladstone's sermons. That of 23 April 1848 [GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 252-55, Easter Sunday] states that the resurrection helps us grow into righteousness. It is the new Christian Sabbath or Eucharist, the capital, crowning event of the life of Our Lord for us. The sermon of 6 June 1841 [GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 123-26, Trinity Sunday] asserts that the atonement is not enough (on its own) for our salvation. First of all we must uphold the Gospel of the Incarnation and the Trinity and learn obedience with Christ. His memorandum of 31 December 1854 [GP Add Mss 44744, f. 134] stresses that it is not unaided faith alone that saves the believer but, additionally, the *application* of Christ's justification.

<sup>140</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 87-89.



inwardly digested in the minds of the apostles during these forty days before the glory of its message could be proclaimed.<sup>141</sup>

Earlier in the 1860s Gladstone had argued on the need for Christ to ascend into Heaven. This was part of a discussion on the hard sayings of Christ concerning his earthly departure - Luke 18.24 and 14.26-7, Matthew 10.34 and 18.8. This was required so that the apostles, including later Paul and Barnabas, could also become types and patterns of the new life. Thus, the necessity for the physical departure of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit as the divine comforter. The apostles needed to move beyond the childhood faith dependent upon the physical presence of Christ towards the mature spirituality. They must work by faith and overcome the spiritual conflicts of life.<sup>142</sup> In this case Gladstone dwelt not only on the wider significance of the atonement to humanity but also considered it as an event in the development of the relationship of the oneness of the Father and Son and of their mysterious counsels.<sup>143</sup>

There was another facet, associated in Gladstone's thought, on the progressive view of Christ as the incarnate Word. It has already been shown that, for Gladstone, Christ's *modus operandi* on earth was one of graduation. Appealing to Eph. 4.6 Gladstone argued that this was no arbitrary *ipse dixit*,<sup>144</sup>

But in that humility does there not lie the wisdom of the Master Builder, who proceeded precept upon precept, line upon line; who was minded to set, each in their proper place and degree, the stones of the spiritual temple, so that 'the whole body' might be 'fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every point?'<sup>145</sup>

At various points throughout his life Gladstone dealt with the theologically crucial, but difficult, problem: how can Christ be sinless, the eternal Son of God, and yet

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-108. See also sermon of 23 March 1845 [GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 138-41]. In the days between the resurrection and the ascension the atonement of Christ continues as "the most remarkable and the most replete with great events, of His whole sojourn on Earth. For in them He was busied with laying the foundations of His Church". In this way the great evangelical commission is privileged. All the purposes for which His ministers are sent out are related to those for which He was sent, as inferior stones in a building are related to the cornerstone. In clear language the Apostles plead the atonement of Christ before the people and communicate it through the Holy Eucharist. Christ's death is only the first fruits (1 Cor. 15), as to the actual deliverance from sin and death. Christ's death only began the process. For us it is still ongoing.

<sup>142</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 126-33, 28 April 1861, Sermon, Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

<sup>143</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 327. See the section above on speculation.

<sup>144</sup> Gladstone, *EH*, p. 68.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.



be said in the Gospels to grow in wisdom, stature and favour (holiness or grace) with the Father?<sup>146</sup> The necessary answer was that, as regards his manhood, it is true to contend that Christ grew in grace, learning obedience and perfection through trial, pain and suffering.<sup>147</sup> This was a wonderful aspect of the incarnation as a great work of love. In his manhood Christ develops as we developed. John 10. 33-5 shows him grieving at the loss of Lazarus, whilst Luke 19.41 shows this for the city of Jerusalem. In the garden of Gethsemane Christ prayed more earnestly as he sought spiritual aid from the Father. This shows that the human nature of Christ did not retain the high inflexibility of the Godhead. Otherwise he could never have been the victim on the cross for us or become the pattern man so that we could be recast in his image. He became perfect for us in order to be the 'captain of our salvation'.<sup>148</sup>

The elder brother has by his spirit left on record in scripture instructions for his younger brethren to partake in his learned obedience. "Not as I will, but as thou wilt. Not my will but thine be done!"<sup>149</sup> This is why Gladstone continually repeated in his sermons that the work or example of Christ should strike a deep and lasting root in us and therefore must transform and advance us. We must do more than simply comprehend the life of Christ; we must live it (shades of Coleridgeian thinking). That is why the idea of the pattern man as a concept for Christ assumed so central a position in Gladstone's thought.<sup>150</sup> For it encapsulated the idea of progress in us. We needed to mortify and put to death the old Adam within us. Only in imitation of Christ can we tread the arduous path of spiritual development.<sup>151</sup> This is a process (not an idea or a feeling, Coleridge again, but also Newman) undertaken by continuous small steps.<sup>152</sup>

This is no small step for Christ to have taken. Even he as the incarnate God at first recoiled from the terrible suffering, having to overcome his natural human sensibilities. "The Almightyness of the Godhead of Jesus seemed to pause for a moment

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<sup>146</sup> See, for example, (1) *Sermons*, 23 May 1843; 31 March 1844; 12 March 1854; 1 April 1855; 22 April 1855; 3 April 1863; (2) *Memoranda*, GP Add Mss 44728, ff. 175-92, 1847; 44744, ff. 185-90, c.1851-54; (3) *EH*, (1868), pp 24-69, passim, and 113-14; (4) *Atonement*, (1894), pp. 322-24 and (5) *SSB*, 1896, pp. 327-33.

<sup>147</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 100-103, 22 April 1855, Sermon, Wednesday in Passion Week.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, f. 31, 23 May 1843, Sermon, Union of the Will.

<sup>150</sup> Examples include, GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 275-79, 9 October 1842; 44780, ff. 95-96, 31 March 1844; ff. 97-100, 5 April 1844; ff. 256-59, 11 June 1848; 44781, ff. 1-4, 25 February 1849, ff. 93-96, 1 April 1855; and ff. 184-87, 9 April 1865.

<sup>151</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 1-4, 25 February 1849, Sermon, Quinquagesima Gospel, First Sunday of Lent.

<sup>152</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, f. 93, 1 April 1855, Sermon, Palm Sunday.



in view of His work and to look around and see if there were any other way whereby ruin wrought by Adam's sin might be repaired". So that "(e)ven He in his sinless humanity, was not at first what he became at last: and the captain of our salvation was perfected through suffering. His manhood which was to be throughout all time a type...acquired its highest temper and the full strength of its tissue by passing through a furnace of affliction made seven times hotter than its worst".<sup>153</sup> Christ, then, reached a summit of honour far, far above that of Abraham when he was prepared to kill his son Isaac at God's behest.<sup>154</sup> In another Old Testament parallel, Gladstone in his 1864 Good Friday sermon proclaimed Christ as the great consummation of the sorrow espoused by the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>155</sup> For at the point of death Christ was cut off from his habitual relation to his eternal father. He had to face the darkness of the universe alone in the weakness of his human flesh.<sup>156</sup>

(v) The atonement of Christ: Gladstone's 1894 article and its significance.

Turning to approach, in a more systematic way, Gladstone's views on the atonement itself it is well to remember that he distinguished the question of why Christ had to die and suffer from the more difficult inquiry of whether such atonement was unjust. The first question is tackled in his sermons with great force and clarity. The debate over the morality of a vicarious or penal substitutionary atonement can be traced in several (unpublished) memoranda and compared with his final published position outlined in the mid-1890s.

Several prominent ideas run throughout the course of the household sermons from the 1840s to the 1860s. There is no evidence to suggest these views were disregarded or abandoned in Gladstone's later life. The atonement was the centre, hinge or fulcrum of human history. In it was laid the destiny of every soul.<sup>157</sup> It was the true ground and motive of Christian love.<sup>158</sup> The crucifixion was the crowning event of Christ's career. The cross, formerly a sign of degradation, was now "the noblest among

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 94-96.

<sup>154</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, f. 95, 31 March 1844, Sermon, Palm Sunday.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 98-99, 5 April 1844, Sermon, Good Friday. Based on Lam. 1.12.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 99.

<sup>157</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, f. 97, 5 April 1844, Sermon, Good Friday.

<sup>158</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, f. 202, 6 February 1842, Sermon, Quinquagesima Sunday.

all the noble symbols, the tree of life, the sign of hope and the promise of glory".<sup>159</sup> For Gladstone it may be beyond the power of human reason to fully understand the precise manner in which the atonement was accomplished. However, it is undeniable that it was an expiation, a propitiation, a sin-offering in which Christ was our ransom and paid all of our debts to justice.<sup>160</sup>

This does not mean that Gladstone saw the atonement purely in a moderate Arminian evangelical way. His view was firmly embedded in an Anglo-Catholic and patristic foundation. Discoursing on the Holy Eucharist, he makes this clear,

if there be a doctrine which more than any other draws the rest along with it and so may...fitly be taken to represent the whole it is the doctrine of the incarnation...It is the foundation of the whole doctrine of atonement, for by His [Christ's] uniting the nature of God with that of man He became the perfect and acceptable victim, He paid the boundless price which covered...the transgressions of our race. But by the incarnation we learn not only how wrath was appeased, how the handwriting that was against us has been taken away, but likewise and yet more signally how a new and living righteousness is brought in...the children of men not only reconciled to God which by itself would be glorious, but made one with God which is more glorious. That wholly inward union with our Creator which (Adam had lost) and in obedience (the second Adam) was to receive in obedience: but the work of this union was to be in the person of Christ<sup>161</sup>

Robert Wilberforce in *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* also linked Christ's mediation with his incarnation and man's participation through the Eucharist. Christ is the mediator because he is the second Adam and the pattern man. No other can take his place, as he is the bridge that joins Heaven and earth, the sole channel of saving grace.<sup>162</sup>

Why does Christ suffer and die? What are the great lessons of the crucifixion? In order to see how Gladstone answered these we should recognise that for Gladstone Christ was the spotless Lamb of God. Gladstone also stressed the human side to Christ's suffering.

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<sup>159</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 156 and 158, 3 April 1863, Sermon, Gospel for Good Friday. See also, H. E. W. Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption. A Study of the Development of Doctrine During the First Five Centuries*, (London, 1952), pp. 46 and 51.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 159-60.

<sup>161</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 249-50, 19 March 1848, Sermon, Holy Eucharist.

<sup>162</sup> Wilberforce, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*, pp. 211-15.



Gladstone commonly outlined two ways in which Christ affected the atonement. Firstly, as a sin offering; and secondly as a thank offering.<sup>163</sup> This twofold theme is given a set of variations so that Christ atoned both as victim and the new Adam<sup>164</sup>; that Christ died a saving (expiatory) death but also a transforming death<sup>165</sup>; that the atonement was a renewal in holiness and also a reunion of God with man.<sup>166</sup> There is the repeated point that Christ's death had both an inward and an outward aspect.<sup>167</sup>

What is the significance of this dual scheme? It in no way demoted the terrible aspects of the death of Christ nor undervalued the pardoning efficacy of the cross.<sup>168</sup> Gladstone did not wish to diminish noticing the awful and mysterious pains of the crucifixion (which he alluded to in several of his annotations on reading connected with the atonement).<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, as early as 1840 he wrote: "But that feeble, wasted, agonised form is the form in which the eternal God has taken flesh: it is therefore of him who is called 'wonderful, counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of Peace'".<sup>170</sup> He further goes on to link this idea of the sin and thank offering of Christ specifically with the Eucharistic aspect of this sacrifice as well as its vicarious quality.<sup>171</sup> The importance of the crucifixion is not to dwell on the penal or substitutionary elements but to highlight that Christ finally and deliberately gave back to God the unconditional obedience of a human will forsaken or stolen from God by Adam. Christ's death was

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<sup>163</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, ff. 30-33, 17 April 1840, Sermon, Palm Sunday or Good Friday.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 34-37 and 38-41, 19, 26 April 1840, Sermons, Easter Sunday: The Resurrection (I) and (II).

<sup>165</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 171-74, 5 April 1846, Sermon, Palm Sunday.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 231-34, 24 October 1847, Sermon, Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

<sup>167</sup> See GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 101-104, 7 April 1844, Easter; ff. 171-74, 5 April 1846, Palm Sunday; ff. 231-34, 24 October 1847, Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity; ff. 252-55, 23 April 1848, From the Passage Appointed for the Epistle of Easter Sunday; and 44781, ff. 156-60, 3 April 1863, Gospel for Good Friday.

<sup>168</sup> See, for example, GP Add Mss ff. 131-34, 5 April 1846, Sermon, Palm Sunday.

<sup>169</sup> See, *Atonement. The Fundamental Fact of Christianity. By Newman Hall, LL.B, D.D. (Edin)*, (Oxford, 1893), p. 47. Gladstone marked 'NB' to the following passage: "If Christ's sufferings were for an example, they have a terrible aspect to all those who desire to imitate him, showing that a faultless life may have the most disastrous close, that endeavours to please God may be attended by the sternest signs of disapproval, and that God seemed rather to frown than to smile on His tenderness towards us and His endeavours to show how much God loves us". On pp. 89 and 111 Gladstone, likewise, marks notice of the 'pattern man' idea. Also R. W. Dale, *The Atonement, The Congregational Union Lectures for 1875*, (London, 1875). On several pages Gladstone notes Dale's description of the terror of Christ's passion (pp. 54, 55 and 58, Gladstone, 'V'). However Gladstone has written 'ma' when Dale suggested an increasing terror of death during the course of Christ's life.

<sup>170</sup> GP Add Mss 44799, f. 30, 17 April 1840, Sermon, Palm Sunday or Good Friday.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 32.



sacrificial, yet Gladstone chose to privilege its obedience in which body, soul and spirit were offered up to God.<sup>172</sup>

Above all, for Gladstone Christ's act of redemption was the ultimate (and unrepeatable) example for all to strive towards in their hearts. "(B)ecoming a victim in our stead, he likewise became head of the Church, and the Church (is) His body".<sup>173</sup> The crucifixion is a trigger to purge our consciences of sin and evil by a sharp and obedient trial.<sup>174</sup> By Baptism we become participants in Christ's body (the Church) and must accomplish the same atoning example after Christ's. This can only be partial; it cannot repeat Christ's efficiency of grace. In spite of being an imperfect shadow, our sufferings are truly beneficial for Christ as the elder brother continues to suffer and atone in the pains of his brethren. His suffering is never complete until the work of expiating sin in humanity is finished.<sup>175</sup>

This is one reason why Gladstone drew attention to the resurrection and ascension of Christ as being of equal importance to salvation and why it is un-Christian and futile to dwell merely on the externalities of atonement. Hence the resurrection (or the new Christian Sabbath) is distinguished beyond all other earthly events of the Lord in that it is celebrated not annually but weekly by the Church.<sup>176</sup>

In a sermon for Easter Sunday 1848 Gladstone inquired into the meaning of the resurrection, especially in connection with the atonement. He first of all notices the many subsidiary meanings attached to the resurrection: for example, to prove that Christ was no impostor, to show the truth of his teaching, to lift up his dejected followers and as a pledge of the future life. He does not neglect to mention that the resurrection is a proof that the Father accepted Christ's awful sacrifice on the cross and the sentence for condemnation because of our sins is effaced. Greater than all of these, the true and eternal glory of the resurrection is that it inaugurates the new Christian life. The death and the resurrection of the Lord are not mere historical events.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 32.

<sup>173</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, f. 221, 13 May 1842, Sermon, Fifth Sunday in Lent.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 220-21.

<sup>175</sup> GP Add Mss 44779, f. 33, 17 April 1840, Sermon, Palm Sunday or Good Friday. See also, Pusey, *Sermons*, pp. 330-334; Wilberforce, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*, pp. 310-12, 364, 405, 411, 426 and 452; and Arnold, *Sermons*, numbers 3, 4, 10 and 11.

<sup>176</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, f. 252, 23 April 1848, Sermon, From the Passage Appointed for the Epistle of Easter Sunday.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 253-55.



They are not the mere elements of a great transition, by which a judicial sentence against sinners was blotted out at the price of innocent and most precious blood, given and taken for us. They have a living and continual power...the death of Christ is still our death unto sin: the resurrection of Christ is still our birth unto righteousness and our new life in it.<sup>178</sup>

A related strand to this thought concerns the outward and inward aspects of the atonement. Christ's resurrection as the foretaste of salvation is neither one of outward profession (a danger of evangelicalism), nor even of outward action. In contrast it is a new life placed within the heart of man. In the centre of a human being is placed a new root of action. Had the redeemer only dealt with externalities, or simply left a set of holy commands,

"He would have placed us in a state of hopeless conflict with ourselves, the law of truth terribly witnessing against the mastery of sin yet having no power to contend or overcome it. But God be thanked it is not so. That which the redeemer bought for us by His sacrifice [,] that which he bequeathed to us in this testament signed in blood, was the power of an endless life: which was not merely to throw out and baffle and obstruct our inclinations but to change them, which was not merely to combat our unwillingness but to convert it into willingness"<sup>179</sup>

"He has left of Himself not only an image to contemplate but a living example to follow". Christ's expiatory death was also a transforming death. Crucial to Gladstone's argument was that this death must lead to a true and inward desire to be transformed into the likeness of the redeemer. This inward-outward aspect is applied analogously to the work of the cross itself. Just as a spear does not make a warrior, or a book a sage, so the real and unseen sacrifice of the Lord is the rending of his soul. The visible breaking of the body and the shedding of blood are simply emblems of the true passion.<sup>180</sup> St. Paul, claims Gladstone, became such a pattern formed by Christ, for he lost sight of the gift of pardon on the cross (however great and full of glory this is) to glory in the greater gift of redemption, that is holiness and likeness to God.<sup>181</sup> On the cross Christ was not only our victim or priest but also our pattern or example. It was a spiritual as well as a

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 255. See Also, 44780, ff. 101-104, 17 April 1844, Sermon, Easter; ff. 134-37, 25 March 1845, Sermon, From the Epistle for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity; and ff. 138-41, 23 March 1845, Sermon, First Sunday after Easter.

<sup>179</sup> GP Add Mss 44780, ff. 101-103, 7 April 1844, Sermon, Easter.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 171-74, 5 April 1846, Sermon, Palm Sunday.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 233, 24 October 1847, Sermon, Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.

physical cross of obedient self-renouncement.<sup>182</sup> If we follow this pattern of self-denial, self-conquest and renewal of holiness we too, in a measure, are crucified like Christ and complete what is left behind from his sufferings, (see Philemon 2 and 2 Tim. 2.12 and 19).<sup>183</sup>

Hence it is important to recognise Gladstone's contrast of Christ's human pains with his divine status and his inward and emotional agonies vis-à-vis his outward physical pain and torments - in particular the fact that the glorious indwelling presence of the Father was withdrawn on Calvary. Human and divine love, love exemplified, are combined on the cross with the prayer for forgiveness of his executioners, (Luke 23.24), for the penitent thief (Luke 23.43) and concern for his mother and beloved disciple (John 19.27). The atonement simultaneously demonstrates the perfect justice of God and his unfathomable love. To Gladstone the second aspect was of far more significance. The act of atonement may have occurred once and for all but the loving virtue and efficacious intercession continues in the ascended High Priest at the right hand of the Most High.<sup>184</sup>

The justification for the continuation of views such as these in Gladstone's later years is very much strengthened when these ideas are set against those espoused in his public defence of the doctrine of vicarious atonement in 1894. Here, too, the weight is placed on the ethical and exemplary nature of redemption rather than its forensic or ontological operation. The article, from the *Nineteenth Century*, tapped a vein of thinking on the subject of the atonement that can be found in an undated memorandum written in the late 1880s or early 1890s. Gladstone undertook to explain the following passage, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood'. This refers to the washing away of sin in the blood of the Lamb of God who is Christ. Gladstone wrote: "The idea of washing away sin is in itself profoundly ethical. The element put forward in it is the removal of poison and the filth of sin, not of punishments due to it, and of the pain of that punishment".<sup>185</sup>

The incipient reason behind the article on the atonement had been to defend the justice of God in accepting a vicarious suffering from Christ and imparting a vicarious righteousness to the sinner.<sup>186</sup> However, the main defence turned upon ethical rather than forensic subject matter. Undoubtedly for Gladstone the two are not mutually

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 234.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 234.

<sup>184</sup> GP Add Mss 44781, ff. 158-60, 3 April 1863, Sermon, Gospel for Good Friday.

<sup>185</sup> GP Add Mss 44792, ff. 255-56, undated memorandum by Gladstone, late 1880s - early 1890s.

<sup>186</sup> Gladstone, *Atonement*, p. 316.



exclusive in Christianity.<sup>187</sup> He argued that Christ's atonement is a relief, not only from pain but, also, from evil. There is a moral as well as a physical redemption. The vicarious suffering by Christ is absolutely ethical in its basis and in no way disparages the justice and righteousness of God.<sup>188</sup> A pretext for impugning the divine character is artificially constructed, Gladstone argued, only when the vicarious efficacy of Christ's sufferings are separated from the moral consequences in the person, who by incorporation into the Church or body of Christ, obtains the application of Christ's redeeming power.<sup>189</sup>

Pardon cannot be detached from the active process of moral regeneration. Pardon is, Gladstone claims, what in the Pauline sense would appear as an initial justification. The term 'pardon' does imply a partial accommodation to forensic ideas contained in scripture. Still, pardon does not completely negate the taint of former sin or the bias towards evil that remains possible in the regenerate person. In order to bring pardon within the saving grace of the Gospel there is need for a will wholly schooled and turned to God. Until then, final justification will be intercepted.<sup>190</sup> To the question, "What, then, is that vast residue of the consequences of sin from which the pardoned sinner is exempted by receiving his pardon?" Gladstone answered, vindictive justice and the penal consequences of sin.<sup>191</sup> This laid emphasis on the individual's active, moral participation in the atonement. Like the Psalmist said, we are to run like the Hart's feet in the way of righteousness [Ps. 18.83]. Until this happens, we are only initially justified.<sup>192</sup>

When set against Gladstone's evolutionary viewpoint of the atonement as an episode in the life of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, the effect is startling.<sup>193</sup> In the scheme of salvation the part played by the crucifixion is relegated in contrast to that played by the resurrection and ascension, as shown above. Additionally, an ethical participation is advanced on the part of the believer because of the need to partake in Christ's incarnation. The social and corporate aspect of belief (a reverberation of more practical Peelite politics) is further enhanced by this incarnational reference since the road to righteousness lies in incorporation into the body of Christ in the Eucharist

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 328-29.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>193</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 7.

and the other sacraments of the Church. There is even an echo of one of Thomas Arnold's sermons contained in Gladstone's thought. Like Arnold, Gladstone argues that we need to learn to love the divine perfections that Christ's life exhibited. One must fully acquaint oneself with the character of Christ's life and death and, through this, grow more and more in the image of the incarnate redeemer.<sup>194</sup> Arnold insisted that Christ as our mediator is the most important and also the most deeply practical of divine truths.<sup>195</sup> Such thinking as this is amalgamated in Gladstone's mind with that of Pusey's thought. For Pusey the resurrection (rather than simply the cross) is the pledge or a beginning of a new life not yet completely achieved. According to Pusey, to be truly saved we must become engrafted into the spirit of Christ so that we become participants of His death, burial, resurrection and ascension.<sup>196</sup>

At the same time Gladstone does not uphold the liberal or subjective view of atonement (that is, Christ's atonement is true, but not sufficient), despite pointing out the inward influence and exemplary nature of the work of Christ. Even in his reading on the subject he is quick to mark 'XX justfn=atonement' when one author argues that St. Paul used the idea of justification in the subjective sense of a perfect conscience.<sup>197</sup> When the same author went on to contend that a subjective atonement is simply a modification of the anti-Pauline doctrine of salvation by works, Gladstone noted in the margin 'none (Xtn) do this'. What Gladstone meant is that no Christian or orthodox theory of atonement does argue for a subjective atonement.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore, later in the same book, Gladstone registers his rejection of a cognate doctrine, divine immanence, when he wrote 'ma' against the following passage

Hence, any conception of the Son of God would be scripturally and philosophically incomplete, which did not contemplate Him as, not only as making and superintending all things, but as being personally domiciled, in all his life giving energy, in every microscopic corpuscle of the universe, making each a radiating centre where He manifests Himself.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Arnold, *Sermons*, p. 29.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-08.

<sup>196</sup> Pusey, *Sermons*, pp. 333-34.

<sup>197</sup> [Robert Brown], *The Philosophy of Evangelicism Evolved from the Relations Between Conscience and the Atonement*, (London, 1857), p. 31.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.



Interestingly, reviews of Gladstone's atonement article kept by the statesman himself make for thought provoking reading. More than one reviewer echoed the writer in *The Jewish Chronicle*, querying whether Gladstone remained an orthodox Christian in his view of the atonement. This review went on to claim that Gladstone's theology was almost Jewish - the sinner is not exempted from penal suffering and this is simply morally exemplary, that is, only a deterrent to others.<sup>200</sup>

John Page Hopps, in *The Coming Day*, wrote of how Gladstone bluntly repudiated evangelical orthodoxy in regard to the atonement. By this process, claimed Hopps, Gladstone had become a rationalist, because Gladstone seemed to hint at salvation through improvement. Hopps claimed that Gladstone emphasized Christ the pattern so much, that Christ's sufferings are merely those met with in conformity to the laws of human life in fulfilment of His mission.<sup>201</sup> Hopps argued, "Assuredly, a thing is not so because Mr. Gladstone says it; but in the realm of theological ideas, it is a sign of the times that so conservative a theologian has made such a good journey to the rationalist's promised land".<sup>202</sup> The Rev. T. S. Childs in *The Churchman* similarly bemoaned Gladstone's abandonment of what he saw as an expiatory and vicarious atonement in favour of Unitarianism.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, a reviewer in *The Christian Life and Unitarian Herald* welcomed Gladstone into the fold whilst observing that the *British Weekly* had labelled Gladstone a Socinian.<sup>204</sup> Notwithstanding these remarks other reviews were very favourable to Gladstone. In one, an annotated copy of a sermon preached by the Rev. William Crosbie, the statesman was lauded for upholding the evangelical doctrine of atonement divested of its crudities, errors and irrationalities.<sup>205</sup>

A. H. Forbes in *King's Own* praised Gladstone's insistence that conversion or a change of heart must accompany the intellectual acceptance of the atonement in order that such an acceptance may have validity for our eternal destiny.<sup>206</sup> These contemporary

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<sup>200</sup> GGP 1643, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 9 September 1894.

<sup>201</sup> GGP 1643, *The Coming Day*, October 1894, pp. 145-48.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>203</sup> GGP 1643, *The Churchman*, II, 29 December 1894, pp. 879-81.

<sup>204</sup> GGP 1643, *The Christian Life and Unitarian Herald*, 8 September 1894, pp. 427-28.

<sup>205</sup> GGP 1643, *Mr. Gladstone on the Atonement. A Sermon Preached in Park Hill Congregational Chapel, Nottingham, September 2, 1894. By the Rev. William Crosbie, M.A., L.L.B., Published by Request, Derry and Sons, Ltd. (1894).*

<sup>206</sup> GGP 1643, *The King's Own*, Volume V, No. 62, (1894), 287-96. Other favourable reviews preserved by Gladstone include, 'Mr. Gladstone on the True and False Conceptions of the Atonement' *Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*, Friday, 14 September 1894, pp. 729-30; a sermon of R. J. Christie reported in *The Carlisle Journal*, Tuesday, 4 September 1894; and a review by Dr. K. C. Anderson in *The Dundee Advertiser*, Monday, 17 September 1894.



reviews reveal the extent to which Gladstone's continued attachment to Anglo-Catholic theology was tempered by a liberalising, broad-church, spirituality.

They also reveal an important point to bear in mind in relation to this study. The reviews appear contradictory and seem to imply inconsistency in Gladstone's later thought. However, seen in terms of Gladstone's overall theological development, reaching a mature position of liberal high-church Catholicism, it is clear that some reviewers have understood that the atonement article reflects a consistent trend in this direction, whilst others have failed to comprehend this.

In later chapters, especially in part two, it will be shown that Gladstone's apologetic was consistent and not contradictory. The apparent confusion displayed by these contemporary reviews is largely a result of a failure to see that Gladstone's method was not inflexible but applied at different degrees of intensity. Much of the evidence and charges of contradiction result from the critics' own presuppositions. Those who began from a conservative theology saw examples of Gladstone's later thought as perplexing, because they failed to grasp that the significance of a liberalising trend in Gladstone's later theology was subsumed into Gladstone's broader Peelite political and cultural liberal conservatism. Gladstone's opinions may have been expressed less rigidly than previously but they still upheld a basically conservative vision. After all, he was still publicly defending penal atonement as equally as important as the incarnation.

(v) J. R. Seeley's *Ecce Homo*: Gladstone's review of this and its significance.

Having surveyed Gladstone's thoughts on the life of Christ, what does his review of J. R. Seeley's *Ecce Homo* reveal in comparison with this, and of his mind in general in the 1860s? Seeley's book was an attempt at an historical reconstruction of the person of Jesus as recorded, primarily, in the Synoptic Gospels. The character of the book is evident from the preface, as Seeley wrote for

Those who feel dissatisfied with the current conceptions of Christ, if they cannot rest content with a definite opinion, may find it necessary to do what to persons not so dissatisfied seems audacious and perilous to do. They may be obliged to reconsider the whole subject from the beginning, and placing themselves in the imagination at the time when he who we call Christ bore no such name, but was simply as St. Luke describes him, a young man of promise, popular with those who knew him and appearing to possess the Divine favour, to trace his biography from point to point, and accept those considerations about him, not which Church



doctors or even apostles have sealed with their authority, but which the facts themselves, critically examined, appear to warrant...What is now published is a fragment. No theological questions whatever are here discussed. Christ, as the creator of modern theology and religion will be made the subject of another volume.<sup>207</sup>

Seeley, after reading the first of Gladstone's review articles in *Good Words* magazine, wrote to Gladstone, in defence against the attack on the lack of a theological dimension to his study that,

If it be asked why I publish at all before I mastered the whole I answer it was because I thought I saw that there was one half of the subject which did not seem involved in the difficulties that beset the other half, that there was some vague sense in which almost all people were ready to call themselves Christians, and I thought that if I could in some degree define and determine this universal Christianity that exists in the world I should do a service to both sides.<sup>208</sup>

Seeley used a form of historical sociology to probe the scriptures and concluded with equating the teaching of Jesus with a form of humanistic or idealised morality, very much focussed on the person of Jesus.<sup>209</sup> What is more pertinent to the present purpose was Gladstone's enthusiastic reaction to and defence of such a project despite its evident limitations. Writing to *Ecce Homo's* publisher, Alexander Macmillan, on Christmas day 1865, Gladstone exclaimed, "I know of, or recollect, no production of equal force that recent years can boast of...I hail the entrance into the world...of a noble book".<sup>210</sup> A week later he wrote to Sir Frederick Rogers asking if he could get the book reviewed in

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<sup>207</sup> J. R. Seeley, *Ecce Homo. A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ*, Fifth Edition (London, 1867), pp. xxi-xxii, preface to the First edition.

<sup>208</sup> GP Add Mss 44414, ff. 16-17, 1 January 1868, Seeley to Gladstone. See also a letter by 'author of EH' to *The Spectator*, [ca. 1865-66], kept by Gladstone. GGP 1628.

<sup>209</sup> D. Pals, 'The Reception of *Ecce Homo*', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, Vol. 46, No. 1, (1977), 63-84; and D. Pals, *The Victorian 'Lives' of Jesus*, Trinity University Monograph Series in Religion, Volume 3, (San Antonio), 1982, pp. 39-49. See also S. Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons. Cambridge and Society in Victorian England*, (London, 1968), pp. 177-78; D. Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History*, (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 22, 24-27; and R. Soffer, 'History and Religion: J. R. Seeley and the Burden of the Past', in R. W. Davis, and R. J. Helmstadter, (eds.), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society. Essays In Honour of R. K. Webb*, (London and New York, 1992), 133-50.

<sup>210</sup> Gladstone to Macmillan, 25 December 1865, Seeley Papers, Box 1, University of London Library, quoted in Soffer, 'History and Religion', p. 137. See also Lathbury, *Correspondence of William Ewart Gladstone on Church and Religion*, (1910).

the high - church publication *The Guardian*, echoing his recent correspondence with Macmillan.<sup>211</sup> At the beginning of the next year he was still enthusing to Rogers,

I hold firmly to my own view that *Ecce Homo* cannot be by Dr. Newman. I please myself with thinking that in this busy age, quick at sapping and dissolving, but commonly not masculine enough in thought to construct, the author of this volume may have been sent among us as a Builder and may perform a great work for truth and for mankind.<sup>212</sup>

The Premier also welcomed the more practical result of *Ecce Homo*. Notwithstanding its drawbacks and limitations, the book's value was higher than the standard religious and general literature of the 1860s. The latter was characterised by laxness and a slack intellectual method. Contrary to this, *Ecce Homo* was a book with a wonderful force and freshness of method since it disturbed what Gladstone increasingly came to regard as the self-indulgent and self-complacent mind of the later Victorian era.<sup>213</sup> Thus, the book was "eminently suited" to the needs of his day and generation.<sup>214</sup> Gladstone lamented that there seemed a tendency that,

(t)heir minds [a large class of traditional but unreflective believers ] are like what I believe is said of a cargo of corn aboard ship. It is stowed in bulk, and in fair weather the vessels trims well enough; but when there is a gale the mass of grain strains over to the leeward and this dead weight increases the difficulty and the danger, and it does it this way or that mechanically, according to the point of the compass from which the wind may blow.<sup>215</sup>

The result is either rejection of religion or, more insidiously, ignorance and complacency. If old weapons had lost their effectiveness then new ones must be deployed. However, the best method was to stress the direct presence of Christ as he was presented as Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospels, and then, like the honest Jew, to

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<sup>211</sup> GP Add Mss 44107, ff. 273-74, Gladstone to Rogers, 31 December 1865.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 284, Gladstone to Rogers, fragment, 25 February 1866. See also Gladstone, *EH*, pp. 1-2: "No anonymous book, since the 'Vestiges of Creation' (now more than twenty years old) - indeed, it might also be said no theological book, whether anonymous or of certified authorship, - that has appeared within the same interval, has attracted anything like the amount of notice and criticism which have been bestowed upon the remarkable volume entitled 'Ecce Homo'".

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.



make up our own minds. Gladstone praised *Ecce Homo* for its depiction of Christ with “virgin freshness and penetrating power” so that “(t)hrough the fair gloss of his manhood, we receive the rich bloom of his Divinity”.<sup>216</sup> Such an “earnest, powerful, original” book was exceedingly suited to reinvigorate contemporary theology, the torpor of which had become jaded and formulaic.<sup>217</sup> The following chapters of this thesis on science and unbelief will demonstrate just how significant the use of adequate, modern weapons were for Gladstone and the Christian apologist in their battle against the intellectual and cultural distemper of the age.

What Gladstone’s review of *Ecce Homo* revealed, and revealed publicly, is the extent of a new broader theology. This was one firmly established in, and an outgrowth from, Anglo-Catholic thought on the incarnation. In particular, Gladstone’s cast of mind demonstrates a strain of theological liberalism existing side by side with this Anglo-Catholicism by the 1860s. As we have seen this was an outworking of his private reflections gathered from his sermons, reading and memoranda.

Moreover, it shows the distance Gladstone had moved from theologians such as Pusey. Writing to Gladstone, Pusey compared *Ecce Homo* to the repugnant and destructive work of Renan with its humanitarianism, its absence of the Trinity and worst of all “that it brings down our Lord to our human level and explains what is Divine by our unaided humanity”.<sup>218</sup> Gladstone, however, was unmoved by such screeds. He replied to Pusey,

I own that I am not able to discover the identity of the character you perceive between ‘*Ecce Homo*’ and the book of Renan. The latter is in my view a most odious product of the ‘patronizing’ school: and in regard to that handling any subject connected with the person of our Lord, it seems to me no words can be too hard. It was with the utmost difficulty that I forced myself to read Renan.<sup>219</sup> Strauss, whom I read some twenty years ago, appeared to me less offensive. In ‘*Ecce Homo*’, notwithstanding the jars from time to time, the purpose seemed to me good: but especially the tendency useful, for reasons which I have given at the close of the second part of my paper in *Good Words*. I feel your judgement is entitled to great weight, both on general grounds, and because no doubt you will still

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-22 and 124.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126 and 199.

<sup>218</sup> GP Add Mss 44281, ff. 339-40, Pusey to Gladstone, 3 January 1868.

<sup>219</sup> Gladstone re-reads Renan for the purpose of his review. See diary entries for 24 December 1865 to 2 January 1866.

look at those questions in the same spirit you described to me in I think the first encounter I ever had with you, near forty years ago: the conversation of an already most learned and accomplished divine with a stripling. I have never (however) heard 'Ecce Homo' praised in what may be termed the unbelieving sense: frequently the other.<sup>220</sup>

Intriguingly, in a contemporaneous letter from John Henry Newman, Gladstone's review was praised because it was seen as more valuable for its own sake than as a contribution to the debate on *Ecce Homo*. Newman regarded the stress on the progressiveness of the incarnation as a deeper revelation of God, as "a very great view". To Newman, Gladstone had cogently demonstrated how Christ was the bridge between the antecedent probabilities in history for the idea of an Emmanuel and the Gospel's accounts recording its historic fulfilment.<sup>221</sup> Newman suggested that it is a great point not only that Christ's method of teaching was one of gradual illumination "but of the defect in the patterns of human perception which existed in the world, and made it necessary".<sup>222</sup> A similarly warm endorsement of Gladstone's review was sent by H. H. Milman, the liberal-Anglican dean of St. Paul's.<sup>223</sup> As well as illustrating the censors of *Ecce Homo* to be mistaken, Gladstone had presented the case of orthodoxy in a clearer light than the critics' confused and broken manner.<sup>224</sup>

Generally in the reviews preserved in the Glynne-Gladstone papers, Gladstone's article was regarded more favourably than Seeley's book. This tends, then, to substantiate Newman's view.<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, there are critical reviews such as that of *The Friend* and *Presbyter Anglicanus* that questioned Gladstone's apparent assent to rationalism and a defective exercise in historical research.<sup>226</sup>

Even so, Gladstone, amongst commentators, was far from alone in his positive review of *Ecce Homo*. His hoped for review in *The Guardian* came in a piece by the Anglo-Catholic R. W. Church. Church's review highlighted the positive apologetical flavour of

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<sup>220</sup> Pusey Papers, Liddon Bound Volumes, Volume II, 1857-1881, ff. 403-404, Gladstone to Pusey, 6 January 1868.

<sup>221</sup> GP Add Mss 44414, ff. 25-28, Newman to Gladstone, 9 January 1868.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 27.

<sup>223</sup> GP Add Mss 44413, ff. 314-15, Milman to Gladstone, 31 December 1867.

<sup>224</sup> GP Add Mss 44414, ff. 71-72, Milman to Gladstone, 4 February 1868.

<sup>225</sup> GGP 1628, *The Independent*, New York, 2 July 1868; *The Friend*, Fifth Month, 1, 1868, 'W. E. Gladstone and *Ecce Homo*', Third Paper, [Edward Ash], pp. 124-27; 'Mr. Gladstone on *Ecce Homo*', *The Spectator*, 8 February 1868, pp. 158-60; *Ecce Homo. A Critique by Presbyter Anglicanus. On Behalf of the Course of Free Enquiry and Free Expression*, Thomas Scott, Westcliff, (Ramsgate, 1866), and *The Record*, Wednesday 14 March 1868.

<sup>226</sup> *Presbyter Anglicanus, Ecce Homo, The Friend*, 'W. E. Gladstone and *Ecce Homo*', *op cit.*



the book as an aid to faith. Other positive reviews appeared in *The Contemporary Review*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *MacMillan's Magazine*, *The North British Critic* and *The Edinburgh Review*. One such review by the Congregationalist Joseph Parker, closely read and annotated by Gladstone, although entitled *Ecce Deus*, shared many of the same positive sentiments as those of Gladstone's review. David Pals has commented on Parker's review, "the 'Controversial Notes' did specify those places of disagreement between the two authors [Parker and Seeley], but, as one conservative reviewer [*British Foreign and Evangelical Review*] rather ruefully noted, most of those were rather too trivial to be worth mention".<sup>227</sup> In the British context *Ecce Homo* raised the crucial question of method. Gladstone's review gave a qualified approval to the use of the historical - critical method in approaching so central a sacred subject.<sup>228</sup> This foreshadows his later, qualified, acceptance of moderate Old Testament criticism.

In private reading on material connected with Seeley's book, such as that of Parker, Gladstone made some surprising marks of affirmation. Unremarkably he agreed with Parker's point that Christ was not simply a man but the man.<sup>229</sup> More revealing of the extent of his theological broadening is a double tick of approval to the following by Parker,

Could Christ have been overthrown? Most certainly; otherwise his temptation has no message to man, except one of despair. Whatever is less than infinite, is temptible and peccable; Christ's humanity was less than infinite, therefore his humanity might have been overthrown.<sup>230</sup>

Few books on the life of Christ remain at St. Deiniol's library that bear marks of annotation, but those that do tend to confirm that in Gladstone's later, private reading, no dissonance appears with his earlier public announcements. In a book entitled *The Gospel for the Nineteenth Century*, Gladstone noted the author's comment that scripture nowhere records the exercise of the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience by the Son of man.<sup>231</sup> At various points he notes marks of approval of the idea of the 'pattern

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<sup>227</sup> Pals, 'Reception of *Ecce Homo*', p. 504 and *Victorian 'Lives' of Jesus*, pp. 39-49.

<sup>228</sup> Pals, *Victorian 'Lives' of Jesus*, p. 44.

<sup>229</sup> [Joseph Parker], *Ecce Deus, Essays on the Life and Doctrine of Jesus Christ. With Controversial Notes on "Ecce Homo"*, Second edition, revised and enlarged, (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 44. Gladstone has marked 'IV'.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44. Gladstone has marked 'VV'.

<sup>231</sup> Gribble, *The Gospel for the Nineteenth Century*, p. x. Gladstone has marked 'INB'.

man'.<sup>232</sup> The importance of Christ's humanity and moral purpose also merits approving notice.<sup>233</sup> In a work addressing the life, character and death of Jesus from a Jewish standpoint, Gladstone notes with approval the following comment

And among these improvers [e.g. Socrates] of the ideal humanity, Jesus stands at all events in the first place. He introduced features into it which were wanting in it before, or had continued undeveloped, reduced the dimensions of others which prevented its universal application, imparted into it by the religious aspect which he gave it a more lofty consecration, and bestowed upon it by embodying it in his own person the most vital warmth; while the religious society which took its rise from him provided for this ideal the widest acceptance amongst mankind.<sup>234</sup>

### Conclusion.

Returning to the questions posed at the start of the second section of this chapter, what conclusions can be drawn?

When Gladstone deals with the topic of Christ and human nature there is exposed a marked and lasting tractarian influence. Notwithstanding this, the republished (1896) 1830 memorandum on Butler and mediation demonstrates that the idea of Christ as model, mould, matrix or pattern was fully formed in the mind of Gladstone before the impact of the Oxford movement. The influence of Pusey and Manning's sermons or Wilberforce's theology, for example, served as confirmatory rather than originary sources for these ideas. This shows Gladstone's method to be one of critical dialectic; that is, the development of an apologetic not by a simple step-by-step accumulation and assimilation of new information or interpretations. Rather, the influence of the latter was circular - remoulding Gladstone's thought by returning to the evidence in the light of a new synthetic understanding. The common language involved in these thoughts in British theology of the period should not be overlooked as Gladstone's reading of Thomas Arnold's sermons show.

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<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 50, 54, 55, 58, 78, 103, 112, 127, 167, 172, 173, 174 and 175.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 103, 105, 113, 127, 155 and 156.

<sup>234</sup> [John Vickers] *The Real Jesus: A Review of His Life, Character and Death From a Jewish Standpoint. Addressed to Members of the Theistic Church*, (London, 1891), pp. 20-21. Gladstone has written 'NB I+'.



Significantly, Gladstone's ideas are also heavily drawn from the Christology of St. Paul and the Fathers, which also provided the foundation for much tractarian thought.<sup>235</sup> For example, Wilberforce drew support from a number of Church Fathers for the term 'pattern man' as an elaboration of the Pauline concept of Christ as the second Adam.<sup>236</sup> Further Patristic ideas such as *Christus Victor*, and the recapitulation theory of the atonement can be located in Gladstone's sermons.<sup>237</sup> The Incarnation of the Word established a deep organic and social element in the heart of Gladstone's thought, with a marked stress on divine love (whilst, simultaneously, in no way devaluing divine holiness). The whole of the incarnation, especially Christ's pain and suffering, is a glorious and touching manifestation of the Trinity's close involvement with the human race. Hence, the ideological background of Gladstone's later politics is partly infused with incarnationalism.

Gladstone's ideas on the atonement enlarged upon his progressive idea of the incarnation in their focus on the importance of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and the moral significance of His passion and death. In this the ethical rather than the forensic aspect of the atonement was highlighted. Reaction to his 1894 article shows that some commentators, not all hostile, came to doubt the Premier's orthodoxy on the subject: especially his concept of initial justification and the need of believers to partake of the atonement themselves by internalising the example of Christ. This view, however, existed side by side in the mind of Gladstone with what is taken as a Calvinist or evangelical epitome—the penal substitution, and expiatory mode of atonement. Again, a common theme is not contradiction but a broadly (liberal) conservative defence of doctrine couched in a more open terminology. The atonement of the Lamb of God was unique and unrepeatable in the scheme of salvation in its mystical and ontological significance. Despite this Christ is still offered by the sufferings of his fellow brethren, so that Gladstone always viewed the atonement as accomplished, but not yet complete, in this present dispensation. This amalgam of patristic and tractarian thought (the

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<sup>235</sup> See, Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 143-50 and Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, pp. 22 and 48.

<sup>236</sup> Wilberforce, *Doctrine of the Incarnation*, Methodius, p.77; Augustine, p. 81; Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, p. 131 f; and Basil, p. 296.

<sup>237</sup> See Rom. 5.15-21, 1 Cor. 15.22, 45 and Eph. 1.14. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 170 ff and p. 376 and Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, pp. 62-63. This is the idea of a new, restored, humanity recapitulated in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word. It is based on Pauline-Irenaen ideas.



recapitulation theory)<sup>238</sup> is incorporated within Gladstone's ideas. Any 'party' spirit in their application did, however, not limit Gladstone in his dealings on this subject.

This is even more evident in his review of *Ecce Homo*. Given that Owen Chadwick has pointed out that Gladstone was at one point considered for authorship the relative neglect of this thread of his thought by biographers and scholars is puzzling.<sup>239</sup> If *Ecce Homo* was an important part of the Victorian debate on the life of Christ [and Gladstone's review constituted his only contribution to that specific genre], then Gladstone's contribution was an important part of the debate on *Ecce Homo* itself,<sup>240</sup> despite Gladstone's later reading of F. W. Farrar's enormously popular life of Christ.<sup>241</sup>

Historiographically, this subject demonstrates the continued importance of the debate on whether Gladstone assimilated a catholic superstructure onto an evangelical base. Evidences of a marked evangelicalism in his engagement with the life of Christ are rare. When he deals with the atonement the emphasis is tractarian. Such as, the atonement being both a sin and a thank offering, and remaining to be completed by the resurrection and ascension. The importance of the exemplary and moral nature of the incarnation (strongly reminiscent of a strand of Augustinian thought),<sup>242</sup> as well as reinforcing this conclusion, also demonstrates what Hilton and Bebbington point out as Gladstone's rejection of a static, evangelical, concept of time in favour of a dynamic and participatory view of existence.<sup>243</sup>

Indeed, Hilton has posed the question of the extent to which Gladstone retained the central doctrines of moderate and Arminian evangelicals until the end of his life.<sup>244</sup> Whilst it is true that Gladstone dealt with such issues as sin, pain and holiness in the life of Christ, it is more plausible to see this as operating from a patristically based Catholicism. This was equally compatible in Gladstone's thought with the central tenets of Anglo-Catholicism and the more liberal catholic incarnationist social theology, which is a marked feature (e.g. *Lux Mundi*) in Anglican theology in the late-Nineteenth century.

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<sup>238</sup> Turner, *The Patristic Doctrine of Redemption*, pp. 62-67.

<sup>239</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church, Part II*, (London, 1970), pp. 64-66. The attribution of authorship to Gladstone appeared in a review by A. P. Stanley, *Macmillan's Magazine*, June 1866, pp. 134-42.

<sup>240</sup> Pals, 'Reception of *Ecce Homo*', pp. 81-82 and *The Victorian 'Lives' of Jesus*, pp. 39-49.

<sup>241</sup> According to the diary read only once on the 27-28 of October 1877.

<sup>242</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 393-94.

<sup>243</sup> B. Hilton, 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', in M. Bentley, and J. Stevenson, (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain*, (Oxford, 1983), pp. 46-47; and Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p. 343; Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, p. 137.

<sup>244</sup> Hilton, 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', especially p. 31.



Nonetheless, Gladstone's studies on Christ reinforce the idea of social progressivism (in a strictly defined and limited way), and an interventionist, if not immamentalist, God played a major part in his views. The corporate nature of the incarnation (and concomitant Eucharistic theology) help to explain why evolutionary ideas of scriptural development appealed to Gladstone. However, this in no way implied a fully-fledged attachment to evolutionary theory be it applied in a scientific or theological manner.

His review of *Ecce Homo* indicates that by the 1860s Gladstone was linking the life of Christ with his developing critique of contemporary cultural and intellectual distemper that became prominent in his mature apologetics. It is also manifest that Gladstone transcended any kind of narrow theological dependence on an emerging brand of Anglo-Catholicism where this still moulded itself (e.g. H. P. Liddon) on the first generation of the Oxford movement. As Bebbington comments, "Gladstone was publicly aligning himself with a classic of the Broad Church school".<sup>245</sup> Thus the preconditions for a mature liberal-Catholicism are revealed in his studies on the incarnation.

These studies also illustrate that Gladstone was not completely opposed to the early attempts at applying historical sociology to the study of the Gospels, in Victorian Britain; nor, indeed, to the pertinence of the historical-critical method in general. As we shall see in chapter six on Inspiration, this was a qualified acceptance. Additionally, it needs to be emphasized that Gladstone publicly praised a work [*Ecce Homo*] that was often criticised at the time as historically and theologically inadequate.<sup>246</sup>

There is no evidence to indicate that the views of Gladstone charted in this chapter underwent radical change in the period after 1868. In fact, when a comparison is made of his sermons and his later reading and writing on the atonement, for instance, a marked consistency appears. If anything Gladstone's views became more relaxed or less easy to label with precision amongst the conventional theologies of the time.

Perhaps most important of all, this entire chapter has provided a confirmation of an established historiographical trend.<sup>247</sup> This can be seen in Morley's use of a letter written by Gladstone in 1865.

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<sup>245</sup> Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, p. 139.

<sup>246</sup> Wormell, *Sir John Seeley*, pp. 26-27 and Rothblatt, *Revolution of the Dons*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>247</sup> See the works of Morley, Matthew, Bebbington (3), Lathbury (1910) and Russell in the bibliography.

I do not believe God's tender mercies are restricted to a small portion of the human family...I have no mental difficulty in reconciling a belief in the Church, and what may be called the high Christian doctrine, with that comforting persuasion that those who do not receive the greatest blessings (and each man must believe his religion to be the greatest), are notwithstanding the partakers, each in his measure, of other gifts, and will be treated according to their use of them. I admit that there are schools of Christians who think otherwise. I was myself brought up to think otherwise, and to believe that salvation depended absolutely upon the reception of a particular and very narrow creed. But long, long ago have I cast these weeds behind me.<sup>248</sup>

This should be set in the context of Russell's early acknowledgment of the affinity of Gladstone with Broad Church spirituality (if not doctrine).<sup>249</sup>

Many of the conclusions of this chapter extend or modify those of Bebbington in chapters five and six of *The Mind of Gladstone*, in particular the central place of the incarnation to Gladstone's mature thought. Likewise, this chapter shows that Gladstone was never a 'factional' theologian and drew upon a diversity of theological influences both ancient and modern. Where this chapter goes beyond Bebbington is by accentuating the extent to which theological method was a constant preoccupation to Gladstone's interaction with the life of Christ: most especially in the pitfalls of theological speculation.

This links in with the subject of the next chapter that charts in detail the theoretical underpinning of Gladstone's mature apologetic. It builds upon key themes outlined in this preliminary study of an emerging theory: the significance of Butler and Aristotle, a rejection of avant garde and unjustifiable speculation and a concern to use apologetics to enliven the contemporary public debate on the nature of morality and society.

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<sup>248</sup> Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, 1907 Popular edition, Book One, p. 577, Gladstone to Darbshire, 2 January 1865.

<sup>249</sup> Russell, G. W. E, *Mr. Gladstone's Religious Development. A Paper Read in Christ Church, May 5, 1899*, Second edition (London), 1899, pp. 54-56.



## CHAPTER TWO. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS TO GLADSTONE'S MATURE APOLOGETICS.

### Introduction.

If Gladstone's ideas on the incarnation are viewed as a starting point for his mature apologetics, this chapter will analyse Gladstone's dialectical position in relation to faith and reason in order to delineate the intellectual groundwork of his later religious thought. The structure of this chapter is important. It is divided into three sections: the first is an in-depth analysis of Gladstone's engagement with the general methodological position of the eighteenth century moral philosopher, Bishop Joseph Butler. The second section details the basis of Gladstone's mature epistemology, including his use of Butler's epistemology as distinct from his method. These two subjects form the twin foundations of all of Gladstone's later apologetics. They are foregrounded in this thesis, because, they provided Gladstone with a rational and systematic intellectual method that enabled him to reconcile the results of legitimate human thought with the traditional Christian evidences of revealed truth through Holy Scripture and the historic evidences of Divine providence in action through the Church. The third section shows how Gladstone put these principles into effect by discussing two of his philosophical engagements in the 1870s; firstly, with the Earl of Pembroke and, secondly, with the lawyer Sir James Fitzjames Stephen on the topics of miracle and authority in religion.

By this procedure the chapter will demonstrate a point Gladstone himself made in writing to Archbishop Lycurgus of Syra and Tenos in 1875 in dealing with the intellectual aspects of religion. He wrote: "I look at the great question of the *Filioque* with none of the pretensions of a theologian or of a widely instructed historical student, but yet I am a layman whose habit has been throughout life to observe, so far as he was able, the course of questions of this kind, and to gather in an irregular way all he could in respect of them".<sup>1</sup>

This is not to contend that Gladstone lacked an overall goal in his later apologetics (elaborated below). However, there is a need to underscore the episodic nature in which this was undertaken. This will become even more apparent in the next chapter that deals with Gladstone's commitment to engage with unbelief.

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<sup>1</sup> Gladstone to Archbishop Lycurgus of Syra and Tenos, October, 1875, in D. C. Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, Volume II, p. 64.

### Gladstone, methodology and the thought of Joseph Butler.

After his retirement from active politics in the mid-1890s two subjects absorbed Gladstone's intellectual attention: the ancient Greeks and Bishop Butler. He never completed the work on Olympian religion. Nevertheless, he did leave behind a substantial valedictory study on points raised or suggested by Butler and an edition of Butler's works. There has been no shortage of attention devoted to these during the last decade or so by biographers and historians.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, no examination of Gladstone as a Christian apologist would be complete without a detailed consideration of why Butler was so essential and what aspects of his method and thought Gladstone wished to defend and pass on to posterity.

Gladstone wrote to James Knowles in 1873 that

Bishop Butler taught me, 45 years ago, to suspend my judgement on things I knew I did not understand. Even with his aid I have often been wrong, without him I think I should never have been right. And Oh! That this age knew the treasure it possesses in him and neglects.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier he had written to his eldest son William at Oxford

With respect to philosophy, I do not know what may be best according to modern fashions at Oxford, nor do I know what number of books you should take up. But, as far as the value of the books in themselves and for the discipline of the mind are concerned, I should recommend you as three books Aristotle's 'Ethics' and 'Politics' and Butler's 'Analogy'. You should also read and know Butler's Sermons...I cannot say what value I attach to Bishop Butler's works. Viewing him as a guide of life, especially for the intellectual difficulty and temptations of these times, I place him before almost any other author. The spirit of wisdom is in every line.<sup>4</sup>

Jane Garnett has discussed the prevailing historiographical tendency to focus on the earlier Victorian studies of Butler before the 1860s. This is seen, for example, in Boyd

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 624-25; Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, pp. 367-74 and 379-81; and Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 247-52.

<sup>3</sup> GGP 1644, letter of 1873 quoted by Knowles in the *Spectator*, date unknown.



Hilton's discussion of Gladstone and Butler where two key assertions emerge: the decline of the study of Butler following the impact of new scientific and philosophical impulses, and the fact that this decline was so pervasive and lasting that Gladstone's preoccupation with defending Butler in the 1890s was "almost (a) unique eccentricity".<sup>5</sup> According to Garnett's view, Hilton's analysis of Gladstone does not take account of other interpretations of Butler current in the fin-de-siècle. However, views similar to Hilton can be found in Ernest Mossner's study of Butler as early as 1936.<sup>6</sup>

For Gladstone, Butler, like Aristotle, was a philosopher of life rather than just a philosopher of belief. His method was timeless.<sup>7</sup> Butler's mind was fair and balanced. He took reality, life, in fragments<sup>8</sup> and

His wise instinct enabled him so to lay each stone that it would fit in with every stone which might be well laid in the double light of thought and experience. He is now in his second century, and his works are at once younger and older than when he wrote them: older, because confirmed by the testing operation of other minds, younger, because not only fuller and broader, but with, so to speak more flexible foundations adaptive to the present and the coming needs of the human mind.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore Butler shunned systematising and 'speculative castle-building'. His habit of mind was free, bound to no other allegiance than truth. "(A) certain habit of mind which is usually far from common, and which at the present day, and amidst the present tendencies, both of the average and even of the more active mind, may justly be termed rare". Still Butler's method was eminently rational; indeed, as shown below, Gladstone by stressing Butler's method of scientific induction noted this to be "the sure and immovable basis of human experience". It is unsurprising, then, to find all of this contained within the first three pages of his *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gladstone to W. H. Gladstone, 1 August 1860 in Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume II, pp. 163-64.

<sup>5</sup> B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, pp. 174-77 and 338-348.

<sup>6</sup> J. Garnett, 'Bishop Butler and the *Zeitgeist*: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain', in C. Cuncliffe, (ed.), *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought. Tercentenary Essays*, (Oxford, 1992), 63-96; especially pp. 64-8.

<sup>7</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 89 and *WJB*, I, *Sermons*, p. 85, Sermon two. See Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 248.

<sup>9</sup> GP Add Mss 44107 f. 285 Gladstone to Frederic Rogers, 25 February 1866.

<sup>10</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 1-3.

Butler's method was grounded in the concepts of probability and analogy. His most famous work was *The Analogy of Religion. Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, (1736). Gladstone edited an edition of this, begun around 1830 but eventually published in 1896 as part of the complete works of Butler printed by the supreme academic imprimatur of Oxford University.<sup>11</sup> In particular, Gladstone emphasised that Butler did not derive his idea of probability from John Locke. Butler was in no way a derivative plagiariser.<sup>12</sup> Gladstone accepted Butler's argument that analogy is a natural, just and conclusive method of argument. Gladstone repeatedly stressed that analogy was not demonstrative but probable. It was not predicated upon quantity but is "the resemblance of qualitative relations".<sup>13</sup>

Where Butler argues that analogy between natural and revealed religion and the constitution and course of nature can only support a strong credibility to the general doctrines of religion,<sup>14</sup> Gladstone notes approvingly

It seems as if Butler's disposition to refer to the particulars outside of the Universe outside this earth as possibly concerned in an earthly dispensation, may have been due to his considering the vastness and weight of the Divine Incarnation in relation to the smallness of this world, and possibly of its inhabitants, as compared with the immense range of creation at large.<sup>15</sup>

There are many close parallels between Butler's method (even words) and Gladstone's as the following quote from Butler demonstrates: "Imagination is altogether as much a source of discontent, as anything external in our condition...a man has little pretence to reason, who is not sensible, that we are children in speculation of this kind (i.e. when talking of God)". Gladstone's tendency at times to assume a premise or argue in circularity also finds an echo in Butler. For example, when Butler discusses analogy in relation to Christianity, he argues that this only tells against analogy if Christianity is not discoverable by either reason or experience. In fact, contends Butler, only if Christianity

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<sup>11</sup> "It was in the year 1830, I think, I began to be powerfully acted upon by the writings of Bishop Butler (one of my four great teachers), and I then wrote a paper on his chapter concerning mediation, the matter of which I still view with interest in no way abated". Gladstone to Manning, 16 November 1869. Quoted in Purcell, *Life of Manning*, (London, 1896), p. 407. For the clearest discussion of the interaction between Gladstone's early and late Butler studies see Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 116-18 and 230-32.

<sup>12</sup> Gladstone, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*, p. 5. Annotation by Gladstone.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. Annotation by Gladstone.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-46. Butler, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146. Annotation by Gladstone.



is unlike the course of nature that is discoverable by reason and analogy to be divinely created.<sup>16</sup>

Methodologically Butler's use of probability was (and is) worthy of, at the very least, careful scrutiny and respect. Had not Butler exclaimed "thus ignorant *a parte ante*, we are incompetent *a parte post*". This meant there was moral obligation to find out the truth on the best available evidence.<sup>17</sup> Doubtfulness over the evidence of religion may form part of the Divine probation. Gladstone noted where Butler admitted that religion was not intuitively true. Nonetheless, seen in terms of morality the evidence of religion obligates one as if one had full conviction of its truth.<sup>18</sup> "This obligation in cases of partial proof seems to extend to all matters (a) bearing upon moral conduct, (b) of grave interest; but to abstract and speculative matter only if, and when, we have special occasion to deal with it".<sup>19</sup>

Several times in *Studies Subsidiary* Gladstone recognised the conditions and limits of such a mode of argumentation. He states:

But to ask what kinds and degrees of evidence to expect or to ask in matters of belief and conduct, and to be in possession of an habitual presence of mind built upon that knowledge, is, in my view, the master gift which the works of Butler are calculated to impart. It can, however, only be imparted to those who approach the study of them as in itself an undertaking; who know that it requires them to pursue it with a whole heart and mind, if they would pursue it profitably; that it demands of them collectedness, concentration, and the cheerful resolve not to be abashed or deterred by difficulty.<sup>20</sup>

In the final chapter of *Studies Subsidiary*, 'Probability as the guide to life', Gladstone points out that Butler's *Analogy* does not seek to prove God or Christianity. Neither does it set out to demonstrate the truth of both to atheists and agnostics. Not, however, because Butler's philosophical method is incapable of doing so. It is just that this method, as it relates to Butler's apologetical aim, was limited to create conviction in three kinds of people (1) those encountering the Gospel for the first time, (2) those who had formerly believed but had fallen away and (3) those, who though they still believe,

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 130 and 189. Butler, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 204-204. Annotation by Gladstone.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255-57, 312-33 and 341.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257. Butler, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*.

<sup>20</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 5-6.

increasingly doubt its foundations. It was no answer for Gladstone to leave this as it stood.<sup>21</sup>

Provided one was open-minded enough to recognise that probable evidence was a (the best) guide to human practice,<sup>22</sup> Butler's method could be made into a powerful defence against unbelief. On the basis of probability (directly borrowing Butler's argument)<sup>23</sup> it is plainly irrational to have an opinion of what God *ought* to have done in mitigating all of life's problems and difficulties, rather than accept a communication of what he had done. The argument of probability in favour of the truth of divine revelation and the Gospel is eminently reasonable if it is admitted (a large 'if' for an unbeliever) that a person by free will and innate depravity might fall away from God. Nothing, therefore, is more consistent than that he should be brought back to God by a like exercise of will and affection: in the form of a healthy restoration. If so, it is further sensible that such a restoration of the image of God would be the most efficacious by a mental and moral atmosphere of truth, viz faith. Effectively one would experience the love of God before one could theorise upon its and His existence. Faith is simply another name for probable evidence (see Hebrews 11.1 and Romans 8.24).<sup>24</sup>

Butler, by recognising human ignorance, is not surreptitiously advancing the case of atheism or agnosticism because

There is no part of his teaching urgently required at the present day, when not only are large recent accessions to human knowledge apt to be overvalued by some of those who at least have laboured hard to learn and perhaps add to them; but when many who are totally ignorant of what they are, vain gloriously boast of them as if sciolism approximated to omniscience.<sup>25</sup>

Gladstone devoted a chapter to Butler's critics.<sup>26</sup> He was appreciative of the intelligent and forceful criticism of the freethinker Sarah Hennell in her article 'Essay on the Sceptical Tendency of Butler's *Analogy*'.<sup>27</sup> He even admitted that Butler's specific argument in the *Analogy* by itself was unable to confute late-Victorian agnosticism, positivism and materialism. Moreover, in metaphysics the apology is not without fault

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>23</sup> Gladstone, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*, p. 12 ff for example.

<sup>24</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 359-65.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>26</sup> A slight adaptation from two articles in the *Nineteenth Century* (1895).



and was lacking completion.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, this did not prove Hennell's claim that Butler ministered to scepticism "merely because he does not conclusively dispose of questions that were not before him". Butler has not placed a metaphysical conflict between reason and faith. It is wrong to say Butler checked reason so that faith could arbitrarily triumph by restricting our duty to ratiocination.<sup>29</sup>

Neither was Butler simply content to rest on the idea of probabilities. On the contrary, Butler's entire achievement for Gladstone was to gather as much evidence as is cognisable before forming any judgement. Butler had to rely on the provision of probabilities because that is the nature of the case one has to deal with. Total fact-objective knowledge is impossible as shall be seen below.<sup>30</sup> At the end of his edition of the *Analogy*, Gladstone added the following footnote:

If we project the following classification:

1. Things demonstrated;
2. " of moral certainty;
3. " likely;
4. " not unlikely;
5. " neutral;
6. " improbable;
7. " demonstrated false;

Butler's arguments for religion will range from (2) down to (4)...Butler's complaint is that men so irrational as to place it in (7) are such offenders against reason, that they would probably defy even a demonstration on behalf of religion.<sup>31</sup>

This enabled Gladstone to dispute Hennell's claim that God purposively contrived to limit our knowledge or placed a series of insurmountable mental and moral difficulties to prevent reason operating in the region of faith. However, says Gladstone, "... (The) purpose suggested by Butler for these perplexities is the training and hardening of faith as a moral principle, which Butler never places in conflict with faith".<sup>32</sup>

A much more formidable critic of Butler was the agnostic thinker Leslie Stephen. Stephen had conducted a vigorous criticism of Butler in his 1876 *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Richard Shannon has noted how Stephen represented

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<sup>27</sup> S. Hennell, 'Essay on the Sceptical Tendency of Butler's *Analogy*', (London, 1859). Quoted in *SSB*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>28</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 40 and 91-2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> Gladstone, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*, p. 341. Annotation by Gladstone.

a certain younger generation of Victorian thought. For thinkers such as Stephen, Butler was no longer viewed as a philosopher of contemporary relevance but an interesting relic from an outdated apologetical past.<sup>33</sup> Stephen's critique of Butler was very influential and in some respects became the standard interpretation relied on by later scholars. His main contention was that Butler converted absolute ignorance into the virtue of positive knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The *Analogy* eventually led to atheism or at the very least scepticism.

It was a devastatingly simple logic: God made men liable to sin; he placed them where they were certain to sin and damned them everlastingly for doing so. Where Butler appealed to conscience to save belief, Stephen saw that the conscience merely revealed God to be unjust. Furthermore, Stephen claimed that Butler attempted to meet difficulties by suggesting equal or greater problems. On the question of the punishment for sin, for example, Butler argued that the deficiency of total understanding of the reasons for this should be a positive *raison d'être* for belief.<sup>35</sup>

In defending Butler from Stephen there is a sense in which Gladstone struggled to meet the standard set by him. With regard to the charge that Butler's thought led to unbelief, Gladstone responded: "Both the charge and the answer are recorded with childlike simplicity in the *Odyssey*. 'Mortals', says Zeus, in the Olympian assembly, 'hold us responsible for the prevailing evils: but it is themselves, apart from destiny, who by their sins inflict themselves'" .<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Stephen's criticisms of Butler, according to Gladstone, resulted from Stephen's own philosophical system, not Butler's. This denied free will, moral responsibility and punishment. Stephen introduces God only to be mocked as a being engaged in "an internecine war upon first principles, with which the *Analogy* has nothing to do" .<sup>37</sup>

Actually Stephen had little difficulty in replying to these strictures. This was in an article in the *Nineteenth Century*, January 1896, called 'Bishop Butler's Apologist'. Butler operated within the shackles of a preconceived system. In his apologetics there remained a tension between what he assumed could be admitted and what he assumed to make his principles work. "We can perceive at each step why it seems plausible to him; but directly one looks at it from outside or compares it with any more

<sup>32</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, pp. 579-80.

<sup>34</sup> L. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 1, London, 1876, p. 242.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.



comprehensive philosophy, it falls to ruins. That is why, with all his power, Butler has, as far as I know, failed to make any impression upon European thought. Even by his countrymen, his argument is much more often praised than adopted".<sup>38</sup>

Had not Gladstone made the same complaint in his Romanes lecture of 1892? Here he had appealed

And yet where is the writer who has entered so profoundly and with such measured strength into the constitutive or governing laws applicable to moral conduct—that is to say, to the whole of the rational life of man, or who has led us so firmly or so scientifically from the Christian point of departure to the foundations of the relations between the seen world and its Unseen ruler?<sup>39</sup>

By the mid 1890s Gladstone could still assert in public that no one had ever stated the objections against Butler better than Butler himself. Nonetheless he had surmounted them.<sup>40</sup> To a future Archbishop of Dublin (and sympathetic editor of Butler), Gladstone wrote in a private letter, conceding

There is, I think, a way in which the *Analogy* may have ministered to scepticism without implying any fault. I suppose the difficulties of Theistic belief to be strong and real. But he seems to state them with great force, and sets his arguments by the side of them. When this two-fold representation comes before one who has been positively but vaguely instructed in Theistic doctrine, the objections have all the freshness and force of novelty, which the affirmative arguments necessarily want, and which the higher class of minds are attracted to. But by the weighty considerations you have suggested, minds of a more ordinary class who have got their belief, such as it is, without trouble, resent the trouble that Butler gives them, and punish him by

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<sup>38</sup> L. Stephen, 'Bishop Butler's Apologist', *Nineteenth Century*, (January 1896), pp. 106-22; p. 122.

<sup>39</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 1892 Romanes lecture, *The Times*, 25 October 1892, pp. 11-30, 'Mr Gladstone and the Universities', *Speeches and Pamphlets of W. E. Gladstone*, Vol. XXXVIII, St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden. See also GP Add Mss 44512 ff. 167-68 Tollemache to Gladstone 10 March 1891. "...I remember that 27 years ago at Hawarden you told me that the chief fault you found with Oxford [theological] liberals was that they do not appreciate Butler...I am struck by your saying that Butler is not much read on the continent. Is it not possible that Anglican theology is at a discount abroad, at least in Roman Catholic countries? Another consideration I would submit is that R. Catholics have probably been long familiar with a mode of reasoning which is substantially the same: 'The natural world abounds to what in our finite reason seems injustice; if God permits or acclaims this, why sh(oul)d there not be the same seeming anomalies in Revelation?'...This...marks what I venture to think the weak side of Butler and reasoning-it proves too much. Sir Alfred Lyall, in his Asiatic Essays, seems to say that a mode of reasoning practically the same has been used by Brahaminical apologists".

<sup>40</sup> Gladstone, *WJB*, II, *Analogy*, pp. 316 and 327. Annotation by Gladstone.



superficially attaching value, which is disproportionate, to the pleas of his adversaries. I hope this may not seem fanciful.<sup>41</sup>

To another correspondent he commented

I am a sceptic in the sense of Bishop Butler though in no other. I seem to have light which leads me up to a certain point, and there to be suspended. So there I desire to stop. It may be a poor attitude to assume. But the poverty is ordained and belongs to our condition.<sup>42</sup>

The poet and author Aubrey Thomas de Vere<sup>43</sup> wrote to Gladstone posing another dilemma in relying on Butler as a definitive apologist. Despite de Vere praising him as the most philosophical of Anglican writers, Butler still lacked a method that was able to impart certainty and that might “reasonably have (been) expected in a Divine Revelation, vouchsafed in order to give man a *knowledge* of his God”.<sup>44</sup> Could Butler occupy the middle ground between outright denial and Roman Catholic infallibility?<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, is it just to say that Gladstone’s *Studies Subsidiary* contained “370 wearisome pages” and that, as Mossner wrote in 1936, the figure of Gladstone attempting to resuscitate interest in Butler was a pathetic and anachronistic, yet noble, failure?<sup>46</sup>

As seen in Chapter One regarding reviews of Gladstone’s article on the atonement contemporary opinion was divided. Whilst it is true that most of the reviews were negative some seemed to grasp the point of Gladstone’s preoccupation with Butler.

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<sup>41</sup> GP Add Mss 44521 ff. 120-21 Gladstone to J. H. Bernard 10 November 1895. Compare with 44521 f. 41, Gladstone to Bernard 31 August 1895. “But I happen just now to have read Leslie Stephen’s account of him [Bishop Browne, Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, *Things Divine and Supernatural Conceived by Analogy with Things Natural and Human*, c.1733]. It appears that he had given a rather agnostic view of the Deity and being challenged accordingly fell back upon analogy as something that serves instead of knowledge. So that his path appears to be totally different from that of Butler”.

<sup>42</sup> GP Add Mss 44519 ff. 161-62 Gladstone to George Barnett, copy, 25 October 1894.

<sup>43</sup> Concise DNB, Vol. 1, p. 784. Aubrey Thomas de Vere, 1814-1902, poet and author. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin. An early follower of Wordsworth and friend of Tennyson, Browning and Hutton. Became a Roman Catholic in 1851. Nominal professor of political and social science in the new Dublin University, 1854. Interested in Irish legend and history.

<sup>44</sup> GP Add Mss 44522 f. 43 Aubrey de Vere to Gladstone 29 January 1896.

<sup>45</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 232.

<sup>46</sup> E. C. Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason. A Study in the History of Thought*, (New York, 1936), pp. 224-25 and 226-28.



Thus *The Speaker*<sup>47</sup> although it saw Kant as the more original and profound intellect, praised Butler's method of dialectical reasoning as an eminently practical didactic tool. This was on Gladstone's edition of Butler's works. Gladstone received favourable or well-disposed reviews of his *Works of Joseph Butler*, in a diversity of publications such as *The Times*, *The Anglican Church Magazine*, *The Spectator*, *The Church Times* and *The Westminster Gazette*<sup>48</sup>. More uniformly and emphatically negative were reviews of his *Studies Subsidiary*. Most of these reviews, like that of the *Methodist Recorder* and *St. James Gazette*, complained that he had failed to give good reason for Butler's outdated eighteenth century reasoning and had not succeeded in rebutting criticism (from Leslie Stephen) that the Bishop ultimately leads to agnosticism or even atheism.<sup>49</sup> However, that was not really why Gladstone championed Butler. His master key was his method and not primarily his conclusions.

The *Speaker*, favourable towards his edition of Butler, pointed out that the Bishop's arguments were simply *argumenta ad homines*.<sup>50</sup> The *New Age* magazine claimed Butler's defence of miracles on inductive principles was inadequate, and furthermore, in a modern scientific age different to that of Hume, they were passé.<sup>51</sup> The *Spectator* asked whether Butler himself had really believed in God only on the basis of probability. If not, then how could he convince others? How could probability become for us, subjectively, a certainty that compelled belief rather than just permitted it?<sup>52</sup>

The *Athenaeum*, however, was indicative of a more balanced review. Gladstone's defence of Butler may not have carried conviction, (nor did Gladstone, who had never apparently read or mentioned Kant in any of his Butler studies, defend the Bishop against modern Kantian philosophy and modern ideas of evolution). Nonetheless, it praised Gladstone's dialectical ingenuity and maintained that he should have developed Butler's ideas on probability to a fuller extent because they were still a valid technique.<sup>53</sup> The same magazine's sympathetic but notwithstanding highly critical reviews of his *The*

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<sup>47</sup> GGP 1631. Review by *The Speaker*, 22 February 1896, pp. 215-17. Annotated by Gladstone. Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 250-51. This provides another analysis of contemporary reactions to Gladstone's Butleriana.

<sup>48</sup> GGP 1644, *The Times*, 17 January 1896; *The Anglican Church Magazine*, 8 April 1896, pp. 79-88 - a proof copy of a review by Wentworth Webster; *The Spectator*, 17 May 1879, p. 621 - incomplete review of Gladstone's article on probability; *The Spectator*, 22 February 1896; *The Church Times*, 6 March 1896, p. 293 and *The Westminster Gazette*, 23 January 1896.

<sup>49</sup> GGP 1644, *The Methodist Recorder*, n.d. (1896?) and *St. James Gazette* 24 July 1896, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> GGP 1644, *The Speaker*, 18 July 1896.

<sup>51</sup> GGP 1644, *The New Age*, 16 July 1896

<sup>52</sup> GGP 1644, *The Spectator*, 12 September 1896.

<sup>53</sup> GGP 1644, *The Athenaeum*, No. 3589, 8 August 1896.



*Works of Joseph Butler* did not seem to have unduly worried Gladstone.<sup>54</sup> Tollemache records him commenting, a week after the review, "Mr Gladstone liked his review of *Butler* in the *Athenaeum*". Given that some people in the wider world were still listening to him, Gladstone appeared sanguine on the prospects for Butler.<sup>55</sup>

The modern historian Boyd Hilton on discussing Gladstone and Butler commented: "Assuredly, Butler provided the statesmen with a 'lifeline' back to an evangelical philosophy as the idealist ship sank". Hilton is trying to reaffirm that Gladstone was still emotionally influenced by evangelicalism and theologically conservative.<sup>56</sup> However, this is a misreading. Gladstone still stressed the importance of sin, atonement and soteriological issues in his later life, as had many of the earlier Tractarians. Even here, however, there is a good deal of evidence, (as shown below in the chapters on future life and inspiration), to demonstrate a horizon much wider than a predominant evangelicalism. In engagements with science and Biblical criticism, in views on inspiration and the role of apologetics Gladstone did not have a closed mind that led to sterile thinking or understanding. By the 1890s he was theologically much nearer to liberal Catholicism than evangelicalism or even the older 'high-church' theology espoused by Pusey and Liddon.

Still it must be conceded that Jane Garnett is correct to point out that his defence of Butler by the end of the century had a tendency to be *vieux jeu*, reflective of a mid-Victorian agenda. This must qualify any verdict on Gladstone's defence of Butler. There is some validity in the assertion that he failed to adequately distinguish between those points of Butler's philosophy that were obsolete and those that still had intellectual purchase (see Richard Armstrong - *New World*, 1896).<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, historians should heed the point made by Bebbington: "The severest judgement's on Gladstone's work came either from 'the champions of negation' or those liberal spokesmen who felt he had taken too little account of recent developments in natural science and biblical criticism".<sup>58</sup> Indeed, it is unfair to condemn Gladstone's position as completely valueless, even in the context of a renewed contemporary critical engagement with Butler. See, for example, his careful reading of

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<sup>54</sup> GGP 1644, *The Athenaeum*, No. 3562, 1 February 1896.

<sup>55</sup> L. Tollemache, 8 February 1896. Quoted in A. Briggs, (ed.), *Gladstone's Boswell. Late Victorian Conversations by Lionel A. Tollemache and Other Documents*, (Sussex, 1984), p. 167. Originally published in 1903.

<sup>56</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 342-48 and 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', in M. Bentley and J. Stevenson, (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain*, 28-57, especially pp. 34-39.

<sup>57</sup> Garnett, *Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist*, pp. 74-76.

<sup>58</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 250.



the research of his contemporary as a Butler student Alexander Richard Eagar.<sup>59</sup> Arguments over the relationship between belief and action and the role of induction and probability in knowledge continued to have great appeal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, as Garnett has shown, Gladstone was not alone in his criticism of the complacency of some scientists resting their theories upon questionable or unjustifiable epistemological foundations. In truth, by defending Butler and his canon of probability Gladstone could be seen to be operating within a sphere, albeit mid-Victorian, of eminent intellectual pedigree. Charles Darwin and Robert Flint both utilised the cumulative force of probabilities, in contrast to positivism, as the basis of their theories.<sup>60</sup>

It should be noted in this respect that Butler's demotion at Oxford in the 1860s was more a result of internal theological and political wrangling than a simple recognition of the inherent limits of his philosophy. In fact, Butler continued to be read at Oxford and Cambridge, alongside Locke, Hume and Kant, for example, in the late nineteenth century. In a changed philosophical climate there emerged a new appreciation of Butler as a 'generative thinker', rather than only, or mainly, a Christian apologist.<sup>61</sup> This renewed interest in Butler continued intermittently amongst some scholars of the late twentieth century. Gladstone was not "the last Butlerian".<sup>62</sup>

Even the above analysis does not exhaust what Gladstone drew from Butler or wished to pass on. As his engagements within the debates involving natural science will demonstrate in chapter five, Gladstone valued much of Butler's reasoning on teleology. There is also a considerable interest in using the Bishop's arguments as a point of departure in maintaining a credible belief in miracles. Again this fitted in with Gladstone's wider view. In annotating Butler for publication, he commented: "Butler's argument [on miracles] is not concerned with proving the Christian miracles, but only with showing that the fact of their having been used to prove Christianity raises no presumption against its truth".<sup>63</sup>

It had been part of Butler's polemic to consider whether there was or had been such a presumption against miracles as to make them incredible. His response had been

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<sup>59</sup> A. Eagar, *Butler's Analogy and Modern Thought*, (London, 1893). See also the chapter on future life.

<sup>60</sup> Garnett, *Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist*, pp. 74-76.

<sup>61</sup> Garnett, *Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist*, pp. 67-68 and 82-83.

<sup>62</sup> B. Mitchell, 'Butler as Christian Apologist', in Cunliffe, (ed.), *Butler's Moral and Religious Thought*, loc. cit., pp. 97-116 and J. Lucas, *Butler's Philosophy of Religion Vindicated*, Durham Cathedral Lecture, 1978, (Chester-le-Street, 1978).

<sup>63</sup> Gladstone, *Gladstone, WJB, II, Analogy*, p. 191. Annotation by Gladstone.



that even antecedent to proof, the presumption against miracles in general is less than against particular facts.<sup>64</sup> Butler had written the *Analogy* before Hume wrote on miracles. Nevertheless, Gladstone comments,

All of this is quite independent of the validity of Hume's argument. If we set up contrariety to the uniform laws of nature it may surely be observed (1) that nature is extremely various;(2) that we are not entitled to assert that we know the limit of these variations; (3) that by our will we can set in motion forces antagonistic to other known natural forces, so it is possible that, by will power other and greater than ours, other natural forces may be contravened; (4) that this action of will is as much a part of the law and course of nature as any other portion of the operations established by experience.<sup>65</sup>

This argument summarised Gladstone's defence of the miraculous, worked out in controversy and reading since the late 1860s.<sup>66</sup> In particular, Gladstone had been concerned to provide a rational defence of miracles against the supposed objections of Mrs Ward's theistic novel. Gladstone defended miracles using the concept of body and soul of belief (revealing the continued influence of Aristotelian metaphysics), as found in religions other than Christianity.<sup>67</sup> It is in a chapter on miracles in his *Studies Subsidiary* that Gladstone offered the most complete defence vis-à-vis Humean objections.<sup>68</sup> Combining the above argument, found in his annotation of Butler, with his views on testimony in part derived from Lewis, and an appeal to analogy, Gladstone believed that Hume's criticism did not undermine the reality or testimony in favour of miracles *in limine*.

Twenty years earlier he had used the same reasoning, *mutatis mutandi*, to defend the doctrine of prayer, even soliciting responses from the freethinker Thomas Scott and the theologically non-dogmatic Duke of Argyll.<sup>69</sup> In concluding his correspondence with

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, Annotation by Gladstone.

<sup>66</sup> See, *Eight Lectures on Miracles. Preached Before the University of Oxford in the Year MDCCCLXV [1865 Bampton Lectures] By J. B. Mozley, D.D, Regius Professor of Divinity, and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, Third Edition, (London, 1872); Miracles Past and Present. By William Mountford, (Boston, Fields, 1870); Some Modern Difficulties. By the Rev. Sabine Baring Gould, (London, 1875); Christian Evidences. By Ezekiel Gilman Robinson, D. D, LL.D. Late Professor of Theology at Rochester Theological Seminary; More Recently, Professor of Ethics and Apologetics at the University of Chicago, and Lecturer on Apologetics and Christian Evidences at Crozer Theological Seminary, (Boston, 1895) and Row, Christian Evidences Viewed in Relation to Modern Thought, op cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>68</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 310-26.

<sup>69</sup> GP Add Mss 44762 Propositions on Prayer, f. 252, first draft, 5 December 1875 and ff. 253-54, second draft, 9 December 1875. Propositions on Prayer. Replies to Objections, ff. 255-56, 15



Scott on prayer, we can see that for Gladstone the need for correct method was just as important as the need for valid premises. Gladstone wrote

My propositions make no claim to originality; and I am not ashamed to offer the arguments of the old luminaries in reply to those of the old necessitarians. I have nowhere denounced or even renounced (except *ad hoc*) the views of those that hold that God may and does alter upon recession natural laws; but I prefer a doctrine of prayer which does not exclude this element as I think 1. that it is less disputable 2. that it carries a loftier conception of the great Creator and governor of the world.<sup>70</sup>

### Gladstone and epistemology.

Gladstone's views on epistemology are crucial to any understanding of him as a Christian apologist. There is a need to move beyond seeing him solely or mainly in terms of his relationship to Aristotelianism and Bishop Butler. Although these were two critical influences on the formation of his metaphysical position, what is needed in Gladstone studies is an evaluation of his relationship to philosophical idealism. In particular did he receive any influence from Kantianism and Hegelianism? Drawing together strands from his reading and writing on religion it is possible to suggest some interesting conclusions.

At this stage it is necessary to review some of Gladstone's earlier quarries into epistemology. In an article that looked at some of Gladstone's early private memoranda on the nature of belief and knowledge, Agatha Ramm pointed out that Gladstone's epistemology was predicated upon the futility of desiring 'intellectual inerrability'. She went on to comment:

He expounded a theory of knowledge which distinguished between the thing here and the idea of the thing there. Where the two corresponded, exactly there, there existed full knowledge. This he believed was not obtainable by any man. It was the distinguishing mark of an almighty and omniscient God.<sup>71</sup>

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December 1875. GP Add Mss 44103 ff. 186-92, Argyll to Gladstone, 6 December 1875. GP Add Mss 44448 Thomas Scott to Gladstone, ff. 266-67 3 December 1875, f. 282, 10 December 1875, ff. 290 and 292, 13 December 1875, f. 304, 16 December 1875, ff. 307-14, 18 December 1875. GP Add Mss 44448 ff. 315-16 Gladstone to Thomas Scott, copy, 19 December 1875.

<sup>70</sup> GP Add Mss 44448 f. 315 Gladstone to Thomas Scott, copy, 19 December 1875.

<sup>71</sup> Ramm, *Gladstone's Religion*, p. 339.

In this case the role of reason was twofold. Firstly, there was the use of reason approximating to Aristotle's calculative faculty. This worked from arbitrarily chosen first principles to inductively reached new conclusions. Secondly, there was reason that worked to understand a given variable and which corresponded to Aristotle's idea of scientific knowledge. This reached an understanding of a given set of ideas without seeking to reach new conclusions.<sup>72</sup>

Hence Gladstone saw a hierarchy of knowledge compatible with Coleridge's platonically influenced idealist categories of *Vernunft* and *Verstand*. Since this hierarchy was mainly derived from Aristotle it fitted in quite easily with Gladstone's later studies (on Butler, for example) given the fundamental premise shared by Butler and Gladstone that all knowledge is probable and not certain. Progress, then, occurred dialectically through the interaction of different layers of knowledge towards a definite goal, which, Ramm, Hilton and Helmstadter show was guided in Gladstone's view by providential considerations.<sup>73</sup>

Given the centrality of reason and its foundations for religious apologetic, in 1869 Gladstone emphasized this to a sceptical Archbishop Manning,

When I said that there had always been in me a turn towards rationalising, I did not mean to use the term in its technical sense, but only meant that it had always been my habit and desire to give religious doctrine a home in my understanding, so that the whole mind might embrace it, and not only the emotional part of it.<sup>74</sup>

Bearing this in mind, his 1877 *Rejoinder on Authority in Matters of Opinion* raises the question whether Gladstone did indeed reject idealism, at least in theory. Gladstone, in discussing whether James Fitzjames Stephen had correctly interpreted Sir George Cornewall Lewis' definition of 'fact', rejects what he sees as Stephen's Lockean epistemology. In contrast, Gladstone believed, there can be thought independent of sense or consciousness, for the human mind does perceive a material and spiritual world independent of sense. To reject this is to fall into the Lockean fallacy that there can be no thought independent of sense. There are two senses to the word 'fact'. One is that it represents an object of sensation (and is in this respect objective); and two, that

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 332-33.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Helmstadter, *Gladstone's First Book*, op cit and Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, pp. 349-350 and *Gladstone's Theological Politics*, p. 42.



we obtain in our consciousness a conviction of some sort (in this respect subjective). In effect every person will have differing 'fact-knowledge'. When this is conveyed to others it cannot rise above the level of material image, conjecture or dream. Of the mind of another we can have no objective 'fact-knowledge'. Theoretically, then, Gladstone can accept a heuristic theory of knowledge that contains a large element of idealist thought. Nonetheless, in practice, given the nature of our cognitive processes it is useless as a guide to life.<sup>75</sup>

Gladstone, however, recognised the epistemic value of intuition, extending it into the area of religious knowledge. For rationally binding authority in respect to religious knowledge, e.g. the discernment of God, is partly based on empiricism and in part on intuition and additionally, as the following chapters will show, in divine revelation.<sup>76</sup>

If Gladstone allows a place in knowledge for intuition, does this mean he can accept *a priori* arguments? The following chapters of this study will show that in practical terms Gladstone was critical of such reasoning.<sup>77</sup> Generally this is taken to be the result of his dependence upon Butler. Therefore, it is to his analysis of this aspect of Butler's philosophical method that one must turn.

Gladstone took Butler's epistemological method to be one of induction, "the sure and immutable basis of human experience".<sup>78</sup> Induction led to the laws of a) sufficiency in evidence and b) probability in conclusion.<sup>79</sup> Gladstone dealt with the relationship between probability and epistemology in his *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*, reusing an argument written in 1845.

Nothing can be known except what exists, nor known except in the exact manner in which it exists. When used in a strictly (Aristotelian) scientific manner, knowledge can only be predicated of (1) perceptions that are absolutely and exactly true and (2) by a mind that knows them to be exactly and absolutely true. Assuming our cognitive faculties are correct and provide a faithful record, it is only through a licence of speech that we can say that knowledge can be predicated to us by any of our perceptions. Even so, this knowledge can never be indefectible - therefore, there is no predication corresponding precisely between *our* perceiving the object and the object itself. How

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<sup>74</sup> Gladstone to Archbishop H. E. Manning, 16 November 1869 in E. S. Purcell, *Life of Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Westminster*, (London, 1896), Volume II, p. 407.

<sup>75</sup> Gladstone, *Rejoinder on Authority*, pp. 182-83.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>77</sup> See especially the chapter on future punishment.

<sup>78</sup> Gladstone *SSB*, p. 2.

fortunate, therefore, that Butler in recognising this based his belief on probability and eschewed abstract speculation or the *a priori* in favour of induction. Of course, this (induction) is the method by which most people live and act and it circumvents the argument for absolute certainty based on an epistemology that prevents the universal attainment of scientific knowledge.<sup>80</sup> All knowledge, then, involves an element of trust or faith. Belief is simply the name applied to propositions founded upon probable evidence.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, as seen above, Gladstone is positing a hierarchy of knowledge: objective-correspondence knowledge is impossible (shades here of Kant's division of ultimate reality into phenomenon and numenon); intuitive or demonstrative knowledge is possible through probability. Lastly there is subjective knowledge based upon perception or impression.<sup>82</sup> In cases where evidence is less than certain the obligation of probability remains in force as long as there remains a real preponderance of affirmative evidence. Moreover, this evidence must be of a scope to be appreciable by our faculties. This only applies when one is forced to choose to believe or act one way or the other. If we are not, then we are left with the choice of the total suspension of judgement or a provisional assent. This, in turn, is subject to correction upon greater inductive knowledge.<sup>83</sup>

Given that this argument is dependent upon Gladstone's reading of Butler's method in *The Analogy of Religion*, it is important to realise that he appears to be unaware of difficulties in Butler's reasoning. Whilst it is true that Butler rejects the *a priori* reasoning of philosophers such as Descartes, his entire method is grounded on the assumption that God exists as an intelligent author of nature and a moral governor of the universe.<sup>84</sup> Butler asserts this by the evidence of design in nature, for example. What is more, he asserts it because he subscribes to the ontological and cosmological proofs of God as set out by the philosopher-theologian Samuel Clarke in his Boyle lectures of 1704-05, *On the Being and Attributes of God*.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342-33.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 348-49.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

<sup>84</sup> See Gladstone's edition of Butler's *Analogy*, p. 10 and 328 for an example at the beginning and end of the work.

<sup>85</sup> See Concise DNB, Vol. 1, p. 569. Samuel Clarke, 1675-1729. Metaphysician. B.A. Caius College, Cambridge, 1695; D.D., 1710; fellow, 1696-1700. A disciple of Isaac Newton, translator of Homer's *Iliad* (1729) and a moral necessitarian in ethics. See *WJB, II, Analogy*, pp. 368-92 on the Butler-Clarke correspondence over metaphysics and the ontology of God. Significantly Butler



In his analysis of Bishop Butler, Terence Penelhum, a modern philosopher, makes a point of arguing the following:

Yet although Butler uses these [*a priori*] arguments, if we look carefully at the way he disassociates himself from *a priori* theology, we find that he is particularly anxious to contrast not the attempt to use pure reason to prove the *existence* of God, but the attempt to use it to arrive at conclusions about the governance of the world that God exercises by (a) rejecting the resort to hypothesis—the groundless introduction of metaphysical principles into speculation about God’s attributes or intentions...(b) rejects the fallacies of speculating whether the world could have been constituted differently than what it is and whether this is the best possible world...So although Butler has no temperamental inclination to *a priori* theology, yet he takes up a stance which presupposes that it has certain fundamental successes to its credit.<sup>86</sup>

This is not an attempt to use a modern philosopher to discredit Gladstone, merely to point out that he seems unaware or unwilling to acknowledge the extent that Butler rested on non-inductive reasoning. It is also a further illustration of Gladstone laying himself open to the charge of reasoning *tu quoque*. Furthermore, in choosing to ally himself so completely with Butler’s epistemological method of probability, he laid himself open to the charge of assuming the logic of following common sense in a rather uncritical fashion. Hence, the problem of the *petitio principii*. For the supposition of rationality in common sense, in the question of God’s existence, derived from induction, is dependent upon a whole series of antecedent assumptions predicated on the fact that a fundamental attribute of the divine creator is that He creates from intelligent design and that we can know this as a first principle.<sup>87</sup>

In the 1890s both Lord Acton and Thomas Dyke Acland were urging the superiority of Kant and Lotze (and their idealist philosophy) over Butler (see also chapter on future life).<sup>88</sup> The influence of Thomas Hill Green and Hegelian inspired idealism made virtually no impact on Gladstone despite their common aversion to Lockean and

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admits that proof of the being and attributes of God has long been of interest to him: first letter, November 4 1713, pp. 368-69. In the fourth letter (p. 384, 16 December 1713) Butler conceded that Clarke’s ontological and cosmological proofs of God have great force.

<sup>86</sup> T. Penelhum, *Butler*, (London, 1985), pp. 93-95.

<sup>87</sup> See A. Jeffner, *Butler and Hume on Religion. A Comparative Analysis*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Christianae Upsaliensia, 7, Diakonistyrelsens, (Bokförlag, Stockholm, 1966), p. 29.

Humean epistemology.<sup>89</sup> There is an undated list of notes on Green dealing with miracles. This places it around the time of Mrs Humphry Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere* and Gladstone's review of it in 1888.<sup>90</sup> One of the characters of Mrs Ward's book, the Oxford philosopher Gray, is clearly modelled on Green. Gladstone notices Green's maxim 'Conviction is the conscience of the mind'.<sup>91</sup> In manuscript notes of a conversation with Gladstone at Oxford in April 1888 Mrs Ward broached the subject of the views of Green, contrasting them with Gladstone's sense of the intensity and virulence of sin. Mrs Ward, echoing strains of Green's Hegelian inspired philosophy, suggested to Gladstone "moral evil, the more one thought of it the more plain became its connection with physical and social and therefore removable conditions". Next she noted

I asked him whether it did not give him any confidence in a 'new system' to watch its effects on a life such as T. H. Green's. He replied individuals were no tests - one must take the broad mass. Some men were born 'so that sin never comes near them'. Such men never felt the need of Xtianity. 'They would be better if they were worse!'<sup>92</sup>

Following these discussions Gladstone later wrote to Mrs Ward,

I pressed you yesterday morning with two verses beginning 'Like as the Hart' [Psalm 42]. You gave me as a sort of parallel Mr Green's assurance to you that the reason of his great interest in philosophy was his anxiety that it should tell him more of God. You seemed to give me this as a sentiment on the level of the Psalms...But I cannot describe to you my sense of the incommensurable difference between the two. The question has [been] put to philosophy for three thousand years; we know the reply. Has that reply been sensibly enlarged in our own time? Can we expect it to be sensibly enlarged (but we want it transfigured and transformed) without the most egregious and irrational self-esteem?<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> GP Add Mss 44092 Acland to Gladstone ff. 400-401, 20 November 1892; ff. 410-11 probably March/April 1895 and ff. 415-16, 17 June 1896. 44094 Acton to Gladstone ff. 208-209 23 September 1892 and f. 210, 23 October 1892.

<sup>89</sup> See Dennis Philip, *T. H. Green, Philosophy and Liberalism*, p. 8-11 and 12-14. [http://www.imprint.co.uk/idealists/Leighton\\_intro.pdf](http://www.imprint.co.uk/idealists/Leighton_intro.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> GP Add Mss 44794 f. 98, 18 October? (Circa. 1888?).

<sup>91</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, p. 85. See Petersen, *Victorian Heretic*, p. 76 ff.

<sup>92</sup> Pusey House, Oxford, 8 April 1888. Notes of a conversation with Gladstone by Mrs Ward, Petersen, *Gladstone and Robert Elsmere*, p. 451.

<sup>93</sup> Pusey House, Gladstone to Mrs Ward 10 April 1888, *Ibid.*, pp. 454-55.



Furthermore

my meaning about Mr Green was to hint at what seems to me the unutterable strangeness of his passionately beseeching philosophy to open him to the communion for which he thirsted, when he had a better source nearer at hand.<sup>94</sup>

This is a clear example of Gladstone rejecting a secular, immamentalist, liberal elitist view that locates God in the human conscience, moral life and the history of the race.

Gladstone's private reading shows some interesting observations on idealism and metaphysics. This ranges from his noting arguments on the general validity of proof in religion; to commenting "who asks it?" on the precise nature of personal being; and to exclaiming, "what sane man defines God?"<sup>95</sup> He also notes expositions on negative infinity as applicable to God, where he commented "no: these are mere expedients"<sup>96</sup>. In his reading, he came across German notions of "ideality and the concept of the Word", predictably without any enthusiasm.<sup>97</sup> Commenting on the proposition that the 21 letters of the New Testament contain no formulated or abstract truth he wrote the marginal note, "But there is the Baptismal charter: and the Pauline enunciations 1 Cor XV and Heb VII".<sup>98</sup> Finally he noted the appropriation of the term '*weltanschauung*' to Christian apologetics via Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. There is also a discussion of the ontological argument for the existence of God where Gladstone has written "Anselm, Kant !! Green-Prolegomena to Ethics". This indicates Gladstone's astonishment at the placing of these authors in the same category.<sup>99</sup> Taken together this represents a

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<sup>94</sup> Gladstone to Mrs Ward 16 April 1888, *Ibid.*, p. 458. See also Erb, *Politics and Theological Liberalism*, pp. 163-64; Towheed, *Gladstone's Reception of Robert Elsmere*, pp. 390-91 and Lightman, *Robert Elsmere*, p. 290.

<sup>95</sup> Voysey, *Theism as Science*, p. 4. *The Mystery of Matter and Other Essays*. By J. Allanson Picton. Author of '*New Theories and the Old Faith*', (London, 1873), pp. 324 and 363.

<sup>96</sup> Capes, *What Can Certainly be Known of God?* p. 28 n and pp. 36-38.

<sup>97</sup> *The Way Out of Agnosticism or The Philosophy of Free Religion*. By Francis Ellingwood Abbot, PhD, Late Instructor in Philosophy in Harvard University, second edition, (Boston, 1890), p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> *Christian Evidences Viewed in Relation to Modern Thought. Eight Lectures Preached Before the University of Oxford in the Year 1877 on the Foundation of the Late Reverend John Bampton, M.A. Canon of Salisbury*. By the Rev. C. A. Row, Pembroke College, Oxford, Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral, second edition, (London, 1879), p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> *The Christian View of God and the World as Centring in the Incarnation. Being the Kerr Lectures for 1890-91*. By James Orr, Professor of Church History in the United Presbyterian College, (Edinburgh, 1893), pp. 3, 5, 8, 13 and 123-29. For example, p. 5: "The idea of the '*Weltanschauung*' may be said to have entered prominently into modern thought through Kant, who elevates what he calls the '*Weltgriff*' to the rank of the second of his *Ideas of Pure Reason*, assigning to it the foundations of the systematic connection of all our experiences into the unity of the whole world (*Weltgantz*). But the thing itself is as old as the dawn of reflection, and is found in a cruder or more advanced form in



typically eclectic and penetrating pattern of reading undertaken by Gladstone in his later years.

Some practical examples of Gladstone's theoretical debates in the 1870s: The Earl of Pembroke and (Sir) James Fitzjames Stephen.

It is proposed to use the exchange of correspondence with the Earl of Pembroke in 1873 as a practical example of the main themes of this chapter.<sup>100</sup> This also has the merit of revealing the continuities in Gladstone's thought with two early forays into the philosophy of religion generally neglected by scholars. These are Gladstone's reviews of W. G. Ward's *The Ideal of a Christian Church* (1844) and a review of *The Life of the Rev. Joseph Blanco White* (1845).<sup>101</sup>

In these two articles Gladstone raised issues vital to a consideration of any reasoned defence of Christianity. They reveal a deep preoccupation in Gladstone's mind with the nature of method, testimony and the formation of intellectual habits. With a reliance upon Aristotelianism and a dislike of hypothesis, he incorporated Bishop Butler's ideas on the formation and persistence of habits (moral and mental) to knowledge and belief. Significantly this does not work against a strain of idealism in Gladstone's thought seen in his *The State in Its Relations with the Church and Church*

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every religion and philosophy with any pretensions to a historical character". Typically Gladstone makes no mark of this (or its expansion in appendix II, pp. 42-48) - but immediately notes after Orr's point that a rudimentary version of *Weltanschauung* is found in ancient cosmogonies and theogonies; noting 'V' next to "Zeller on Hesiod's Theogony", *Pre-Socratic Philosophy*, English translation, pp. 88-89. This is a clear indication of Gladstone's philosophical inclination and sympathy.

<sup>100</sup> Gladstone conducted a much shorter discussion with an American inquirer, C. A. Hardy from November 1875 to January 1876. This covers many of the same issues that were dealt with via Pembroke. Indeed, Gladstone tells Hardy he has dealt with these kind of theistic inquiries before - alluding to Pembroke. He also recommended Hardy to read Sir George Lewis' *Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion*, (London, 1849, reissued 1875). GP Add Mss 44448 ff. 189-90 14 November 1875 Hardy to Gladstone; ff. 219-20 Gladstone to Hardy, 18 November 1875, copy; and 44449 ff. 7-8 Gladstone to Hardy 4 January 1876, copy.

<sup>101</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Gleanings of Past Years*, (London, 1879), Volume II, Personal and Literary, Blanco White, pp. 1-64. Originally in *The Quarterly Review*, (June 1845); and Volume V, Ecclesiastical, 'Ward's Ideal of a Christian Church', pp. 81-172. Originally in *The Quarterly Review*, (December, 1844).



*Principles Considered in Their Results*.<sup>102</sup> One of the aims of this chapter, as we have seen above, is to re-evaluate Gladstone's relationship to idealism in his later years.

Thus in the article on Blanco White Gladstone enunciated an epistemology which prefigures his views of the 1870s and most importantly one (enlarged on above) that combines the Aristotelian distinction between scientific and practical (intuitive) knowledge and the Coleridgean distinction between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*.<sup>103</sup>

In all but ignoring the extensive and detailed correspondence between Gladstone and George Herbert, thirteenth Earl of Pembroke and ninth Earl of Montgomery, earlier scholars have missed an excellent practical introduction to Gladstone's dialectical form of argument.

This is another oblique link (often overlooked) in the relationship between apologetics and the clerisy in the mind of Gladstone. His tutoring of Lord Pembroke is similar to the guidance offered to Lord Hartington in the political sphere on the latter's assumption of the leadership of the Liberal party in 1874 following Gladstone's semi-retirement. In encouraging Hartington to make good public use of his political rank and in emphasising his opportunity for public service, there is seen another facet of concern with the nature of culture and society that is evidenced in Gladstone engaging with Pembroke over the nature of belief and knowledge.<sup>104</sup> Gladstone was not alone in this, as can be seen from a similar relationship almost a decade earlier between the Oxford theological liberal Benjamin Jowett and Lord Lansdowne. Like Gladstone with Hartington, Jowett stressed to Lansdowne that "wealth and rank are means not ends, and may be the greatest evil or the greatest good as they are used".<sup>105</sup>

This correspondence with Pembroke occurred during June-September 1873. This was at the beginning of a most fertile period for Gladstone in dealing with the philosophical problems of religion. At this time Pembroke (who became undersecretary for war in 1874 under Disraeli) was 23 and Gladstone, at 63, was at the prime of his intellectual powers.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> R. J. Helmstadter, 'Conscience and Politics: Gladstone's First Book', in B. L. Kinzer, (ed.), *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind*, 3-42; A. Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', 327-340, and H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809-1898*, pp. 33-43 and 61-65

<sup>103</sup> Gladstone, *Blanco White*, p. 25 ff.

<sup>104</sup> B. Holland, *The Life of Spencer Compton, Eighth Duke of Devonshire*, (London, 1911), Volume I, pp. 149-150

<sup>105</sup> Lord Newton, *Lord Lansdowne. A Biography*, (London, 1929), p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> In general, Gladstone's biographers and scholars have ignored this correspondence with Pembroke. The partial exception is Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, p. 116. Although here the exchange is merely noted without any further analysis.



Pembroke began his correspondence with Gladstone after sending him a work called *The Fair Haven*. This work had been published under the name of John Pickard Owen. In fact, the real author was the philosopher and novelist Samuel Butler, whom Pembroke later discussed with a surprised Gladstone. Gladstone read the book as suggested and his heavily annotated copy remains at St. Deiniol's library. His marginalia reveals a close, if not complete, reading of the text. Despite some marks of approval, Gladstone generally noted his dissatisfaction with the argument. He remained unconvinced of the author's attempt to defend Christ and His ministry.<sup>107</sup>

In a letter to Pembroke, Gladstone said that the author of the book had raised expectations which he had been unable to deliver. Pembroke's attempt to see the author as a great apologist of religion was little short of ridiculous. Although the book was not without talent, sincerity and promise, it lacked the characteristics of mental patience, moderation, wide study and reflection which for Gladstone had characterised the thought of Blanco White. It was full of levity, precipitancy, unreasonable self-confidence and reckless disregard for serious scholarship. For example, the way in which the author conflated Bishop Butler and Paley as two great apologists of religion. Having conducted the argument mainly in his own mind (especially on the authority and genuineness of the Gospels); and, then proceeding to convince himself out of his own unbelief, the author of *Fair Haven* understood himself to be a great discoverer. Gladstone took exception to his method of censuring every former defender of Christianity (with the exceptions of Butler and Paley). Had he read Bishop Butler thoroughly the author would have learned how to think and would have discovered a method and a framework in which to handle such wide and deep subjects.<sup>108</sup>

Pembroke largely agreed with Gladstone and therefore switched tactics. He asked the statesman to read one of his own books, *Roots. A Plea for Tolerance*.<sup>109</sup> This is a work in which Pembroke describes the vacillations of thought suffered by a young

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<sup>107</sup> *The Fair Haven. A Work in Defence of the Miraculous in Our Lord's Ministry Upon Earth, Both Against Rationalistic Impugners and Certain Orthodox Defenders. By the late John Pickard Owen. Edited by William Bickersteth Owen. With a Memoir of the Author, (London, 1873).* The book is not completely annotated, suggesting that Gladstone gave up detailed analysis about two-thirds of the way through. Despite Butler's work being a sceptical and ironical defence of Christianity, there appear as many marks of approval as disapproval by Gladstone. This is likely to reflect Gladstone's ignorance of the true nature and author of the work and his desire to indulge Pembroke. For Butler see Concise DNB, Vol. 1, A - F, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 421-22. Samuel Butler 1835-1902. Philosophical writer, novelist and agnostic. Butler, for example, denied the historical accuracy of the Book of Acts in recording Saul's conversion and questioned whether Jesus actually died on the cross. See *Fair Haven*, pp. 53, 70 and 133.

<sup>108</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 45-46 Gladstone to Pembroke, copy, 16 June 1873.

<sup>109</sup> This volume is not in St. Deiniol's library.



freethinker. Pembroke was at pains to point out to his interlocutor that this was not a self-portrait. Nonetheless, he admits that the principal character upholds a good many of his own beliefs, and is later forced to concede to Gladstone that the character's position does, in fact, resemble his own.<sup>110</sup>

Pembroke's book is on the subject of intolerance in the realm of opinion and belief. It attempts to transcend epistemological problems in religion by showing the impossibility for humanity in its present imperfect state to be capable of receiving or benefiting from absolute truth - whatever that may be.<sup>111</sup> Gladstone took the bait and there followed a fascinating discussion on questions of philosophic method and the status of knowledge and belief.

From the remaining correspondence in the Gladstone papers it is clear that Gladstone spent a great deal of time and effort on his reading of *Roots*. The papers contain a short essay on the subject, apparently incomplete and undated (although obviously written at the time of his debate with Pembroke).<sup>112</sup> Its contention is that the character of the young freethinker has not 'roots', intellectual and rational, for the opinions he upholds. At least, there is no grounding in a sound exercise of reasoning. They, therefore, rests upon slippery and insecure foundations: qualities that have often marked the most fugitive and the most fanatical manifestations of the human mind concerning religion and morality.

It is impossible to engage upon any reasonable examination of belief by removing, at a stroke, one's entire intellectual heritage. This is like a man who having resolved to become a farmer rejects all previous books, buildings, animals and expertise and tills the soil with his fingers and nails. Gladstone is distinctly unimpressed by the young freethinker's (and presumably by implication Pembroke's) reversion to reliance upon naked first principles (here meaning *a priori* reasoning). This is unsurprising given Gladstone's Butlerian methodology outlined above. All such *a priori* logic simply leads to the declaration of ignorance as a categorical imperative (my phrase). Nevertheless, this does not prevent the young man from declaring that countless numbers of men (including some of the noblest intellects of the race) have been deluded into adopting religious superstition and presumption. As shown above, Gladstone had an ambiguous

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<sup>110</sup> See letter of 31 July 1873 below.

<sup>111</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 48-51, Pembroke to Gladstone 17 June 1873.

<sup>112</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 99-104. See ff. 114-15, Gladstone to Pembroke, copy, 4 July 1873. Here Gladstone notes sending Pembroke a list of inquiries. These (17) inquiries are at ff. 116-22. Notes on the reading of *Roots* are at ff. 124-26. The essay, notes and inquiries are all written in Gladstone's hand.



relationship to *a priori* arguments, complicated by an uncritical reading of Bishop Butler on the subject.<sup>113</sup>

All of this was Gladstone musing in private. Publicly he sent Pembroke a long list of seventeen penetrating questions that his private reflection had generated. These provide almost a complete agenda of the problems Gladstone dealt with as a defender of Christianity. The most important were the following:

1. How have you become acquainted with the limits of human knowledge to be in a condition to declare that religious dogma is absurd because it deals with things beyond these limits? (p. 122) [of *Roots*]

2. Objecting to the call upon men to believe in religious dogma, why do you believe "in the omniscience and omnipotence of the creator?" (p. 199)

3. If you believe him to be omniscient and omnipotent, how is he unknown? (p. 91) {It would of course be no answer to say 'I do not know only believe' because belief and not knowledge is what is asked of you as essential by religious dogma, which you declare absurd}.

4. If we are in blank-ignorance of Divine things, and this ignorance properly leads to trust (p. 91) it seems that you seem quite entitled to found belief upon ignorance, although you declare it cannot be founded upon knowledge?

5. How can you consent to this kind of belief with reason?

6. Unless so connected how can you justify and defend it?...

7. (Actually question 17 in the list) Huge systems of religion have been built up in the world and now exist. If we take only the Christian system, how vast, how varied, how compacted is the structure, and how has this system given form to measures, laws, institutions and the souls of men. Does it not deserve, and does it not demand a confutation? Is it enough to wave the hand of a magician, and then say it has disappeared from your mental horizon like an enchanted castle? Is this enough to destroy its authority over you, its right to your allegiance? It did not come by accident. It fought its intellectual battle with philosophy and culture, as well as its moral battle with wealth, evil and violence. Is it now to be blown over with a puff of air, and to receive (in your mind) the burial of a dog?<sup>114</sup>

Neither Pembroke's replies, nor his charge that Gladstone<sup>115</sup> had set word traps and questions to be answered in the dark, whilst ignoring the main argument of *Roots*, deterred the latter from pressing his point home. Gladstone did not deny his questions

<sup>113</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 99-104.

<sup>114</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 116-22. Inquiry 17 is remarkably prescient of Gladstone's main charge against Mrs Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere* in 1888. See section above on *Robert Elsmere* for references.

<sup>115</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 135-38 Pembroke to Gladstone, 6 July 1873. *Ibid.*, ff. 131-34 Pembroke to Gladstone, 6 July 1873.



were word traps, but the young interlocutor himself had set such questions. In dealing with the areas of belief, reason, knowledge and God, Gladstone appealed to the Socratic method as one particularly suited to these discussion topics.<sup>116</sup>

The correspondence rumbled on with Pembroke vigorously defending both his positive beliefs and claiming that the Socratic method was unsuited to religious and metaphysical controversy. Pembroke complained that Gladstone had not declared beforehand he was engaged in such a method. As a result, since he and Pembroke did not truly comprehend each other's position and difficulties, it was a deceptive teaching method.<sup>117</sup> If the latter contention of Pembroke had been true it would have been a fair criticism of Gladstone.

Gladstone ended his argument by appealing to one, cardinal, aspect of a measured defence of Christianity that shall be elaborated in part two on science and future life.

What if I say a finite being cannot exist in infinite space? You would reply it was nonsense, and that if space be infinite (which I neither assert nor deny) a finite being can exist in a finite part of it. What title have you to assert (in opposition to the opinion of the mass and weight of mankind) that a finite being can have no true points of contact with an infinite God? or that the true points of contact may not constitute knowledge for the purposes of that finite being? If you tell me that this is not absolute knowledge, I might reply by the despised 'truism', 'Probability is the guide to life': But I reply by another challenge: of what finite being in the world have you or have I absolute and perfect knowledge? Of what single moral action of yourself or anyone else can you form an exact and perfect estimate? How many things are there in the wide universe that we absolutely and perfectly know? It is no answer to say that this is a theological point of view. My contention is that at the tribunal of common sense your method is inadmissible. Nor is it an answer, that the idea of God is mysterious. There are mysteries i.e. conceptions we do not wholly understand, in mathematics, but the man who declined to accept the fraction 0/0 and the formula which declares it equal to anything would I believe be not only condemned but derided.<sup>118</sup>

What, then, is the significance of the correspondence for Gladstone's mature apologetic?

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 211-12, Gladstone to Pembroke copy, 21 July 1873.

<sup>117</sup> GP Add Mss 44439 ff. 229-30, Pembroke to Gladstone, undated c.28-30 July 1873; also 44439 ff. 231 ff, Pembroke to Gladstone 31 July 1873 and 44440 ff. 8-11, Pembroke to Gladstone, 6 September 1873.

<sup>118</sup> GP Add Mss 44440 ff. 62-63, Gladstone to Pembroke, copy, 13 September 1873.

Firstly, it is instructive to bear in mind the following final arguments. Pembroke responded to Gladstone by asking how one could gain even probable knowledge of God without resting on at least some antecedent conclusions drawn from *a priori* reasoning. This cut away the ground of Christian dogmatic assertions based on probability for not only may other equally probable evidence neutralise the first set of probable assumptions, but that (probable) evidence cannot justify the assertion of positive dogmatic truth beyond the actual limits of human knowledge. All knowledge in part depends upon *a priori* ratiocination, thus making a mockery of the idea of probability in the first place.<sup>119</sup>

To which, secondly, Gladstone replied that he had never denied that there is no absolute knowledge of God available to man (the nearest Gladstone comes in this exchange to admitting the validity of the *a priori*). Nevertheless, despite the admitted difficulties of probable evidence, it is strong enough to entail the obligation of action, of belief - as truly as mathematically demonstrable knowledge. Partial knowledge is still true knowledge (i.e. to the unaided finite human mind, the infinite God is ultimately unknowable in His essence). However, is it true to assert that dogma is beyond verification? Is morality beyond human verification? If the answer is no, then why is it irrational to say God is verifiable? This is not a matter of theology but of reason.<sup>120</sup> It remains to be seen in the chapter on science below how Gladstone responded in general to Pembroke's parting question: Does probable evidence entail obligation to believe rather than just permit its credibility (even if that)?<sup>121</sup>

The significance, thirdly, then, lay in the questions this discussion raised. Questions of hypothesis, probability, the *a priori* and the role of Butler in Gladstone's apologetic. For these are the issues he needed to resolve in his own mind before he could participate in large-scale public discussion. Paradoxically it was his participation in such public exchanges of view that enabled him to work out in private his final position vis-à-vis the issues. The other relevant point of the correspondence with Pembroke for the rest of this chapter is that it elaborates upon a view Gladstone wrote to his eldest son William in 1859:

When you are at work construing, you should be strictly on your guard against all guessing except such as is allowable. Here, you will say, is a pretty riddle: What is allowable guessing? Allowable

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<sup>119</sup> GP Add Mss 44440 ff. 88-89, Pembroke to Gladstone, 20 September 1873.

<sup>120</sup> GP Add Mss 44440 ff. 122-23, Gladstone to Pembroke, copy, 29 September 1873.

<sup>121</sup> GP Add Mss 44440 ff. 47-50, Pembroke to Gladstone, 14 November 1873.



guessing is such as violates no rule or principle of grammar or sense...It is very tempting, when we think we have a glimpse of the meaning, to drive right at it; but it is fatal if we cut our way through rules which are in their own nature as rigid and inviolable as those of arithmetic... <sup>122</sup>

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the debate on intellectual method was also one that occupied much of Gladstone's later years. It was a topic in which he engaged in with enthusiasm and gusto. If theism was no answer to atheism and agnosticism then Gladstone believed he had found an unimpeachable defence of belief in the works of Sir George Cornewall Lewis and Bishop Butler.

One of Gladstone's most theoretical dialectical encounters in defence of Christian belief was triggered by Gladstone's membership of the Metaphysical society. This was a group of earnest minded intellectuals, artists, church dignitaries, politicians and men of letters who met from 1869 to 1880. Although not always an active member, Gladstone was one of the founding members and when other duties permitted attended meetings that were of interest to him. A. W. Brown has described the general flavour of the society as consisting of a series of inquiries about the nature and contents of belief in God and about man. Gladstone was elected chairman for the 1874-75 session.<sup>123</sup> The background to his first philosophical encounter is summarised in Brown: "At a meeting of 9 November 1875, after [Sir James Fitzjames] Stephen had concluded his paper, 'Remarks on the Proof of Miracles' (No. 56), there was a long silence. Gladstone, who was in the chair, scribbled something on a slip of paper and passed it to Lord Arthur Russell; he had written two lines from the *Iliad* in Greek: 'Then did the whole assembly fall into a deep silence, marvelling at the words of Diomedes, tamer of horses'" <sup>124</sup>

Piqued, Gladstone determined a reply. This eventually took place on February 15, 1876. For that day he recorded in his diary: "Attended Metaphysical society: made my observations on Mr Stephen's paper, all verifying Butler". His annotated copy of Stephen's paper is preserved in the Gladstone papers. An earlier paper, also annotated, on the analogous topic of authority by Archbishop Manning of 1872 is preserved in the

<sup>122</sup> Gladstone to W. H. Gladstone, 16 May 1859. Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume II, p. 161.

<sup>123</sup> A. W. Brown, *The Metaphysical Society. Victorian Minds in Crisis, 1869-80*, (New York, 1973), pp. 27, and 32-33. Originally published in 1947.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107. See also J. A. Colaiaco, *James Fitzjames Stephen and the Crisis of Victorian Thought*, (London, 1983), especially Chapter Eight, 'An Honest Doubter', pp. 167-90.



Glynne-Gladstone papers.<sup>125</sup> A propos to Stephen's argument, Gladstone noticed Stephen's position, that, to prove a miracle, like a battle, one needed rules; but, whereas there are proofs of facts generally, none are especially appropriate to the proof of battles. Hence, analogously, the same applied to miracles.<sup>126</sup> He annotated the following section of Stephen's paper as follows:

Human testimony, directly or indirectly, is the source upon which all of us are obliged to rely for nearly the whole of our knowledge and our opinions, but its cogency depends upon the degree to which it complies with certain well-ascertained conditions. I find it hard to imagine reasonable grounds for undoubting belief on any matters of fact [e.g. Biblical miracles related as historical events] which cannot even be proved by legal evidence.

To which Gladstone has written "e.g. Julius Caesar/Glacial period/Norman Conquest".<sup>127</sup> There next follows a short note by him defining the evidence for miracles.<sup>128</sup> However, it is clear from the above annotations and his comment "Why special rules required for legal evidence?" that the main interest was on the point of testimony, authority and proof.

Gladstone's notes for his meetings with Stephen are called 'Paper on Religious Proof'<sup>129</sup> and originate a train of thought that the protagonists were to continue in public. Religious proof is not absolute but probable. As seen in the first section of this chapter, this was the fundamental methodological starting point of the eighteenth century moral philosopher Joseph Butler. Until the logic of Butler had been successfully overthrown, the argument for probability, Gladstone thought, must rest secure. There is a crucial

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<sup>125</sup> GGP 1628, 'That Legitimate Authority is an Evidence of Truth. To be Read on Tuesday May 14, 1872 at the Grosvenor Hotel at 8.30 pm'. Gladstone has annotated this short paper carefully. For example, on page three he has written 'fallacy' next to Manning's comment: "As to the *sensus intimus*, or the consciousness of the mind, it is beyond all doubt absolute and infallible within its sphere".

<sup>126</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 ff. 2-9 J. F. Stephen, *Remarks on the Proof of Miracles*, 1876. Annotated by Gladstone, f. 2.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 7.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 10-11. "The question is can miracles have a balance of probability in their favour upon the view of the whole circumstances. Why special rules required for legal (evidence)...(f)or miracles ascribed to human agency. Events which, being (in the ordinary sense of consequence) consequent upon the actions of human will, lie far enough beyond the range of human power, as known at the time, and place, to require us, in the use of our rational faculties, the belief that they are due to a power more than human. Or which, if not so connected with a human agency, lie far enough beyond the course of nature or the ordinary course of the world, as known at the time and place, to lead legitimately to the supposition, of a special purpose of God, beyond the teaching ordinarily derivable from observation and experience."



distinction between religious proof and the kind of judicial proof appealed to by Stephen. In an almost Coleridgean distinction Gladstone put forward that judicial proof is isolated and, at most, inflicts an evil on the person convicted or a good *per accipio* (my phrase). Whereas, religious proof is compound and confers the greatest good regardless of circumstance. In contrast, judicial proof is external to the individual; religious proof is examined internally.<sup>130</sup>

To Gladstone this was the heart of the matter. Since judicial proof is categorically different from religious proof the results of the former cannot affect the latter. Religious proof, being intrinsically composite, is capable of wide application: miracles, prophecy, scripture, history and personal religious experience, for example.<sup>131</sup> There was,

(n)othing unreasonable in this proposition that religious evidence is compound. A number of converging probabilities, in different subject matters, in proportion to their congruence, has a cumulative force. It may be arithmetical progression. It may be geometrical. This is the rule of common sense in life, e.g. especially in the judgement of character, as to which absolute knowledge hardly enters.<sup>132</sup>

The rest of the paper argues that, as Bebbington has noted, because of the compound character of religious proof, it is hard to deal with it in conventional discussion.<sup>133</sup> This is perhaps a reflection on the arrogance of method of the Metaphysical society's discussions. In a note appended after the meeting, Gladstone noted Stephen's objections: that Stephen did not confine himself to criminal charges nor did he argue that probable evidence, which may entail action, warranted belief.<sup>134</sup> This was something Gladstone returned to in his 1879 article on probability. This defence, utilising an argument originally conceived in the 1840s, he was content to republish with minor corrections in his 1896 *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*.<sup>135</sup>

Of more pressing importance were the answers to the following questions he set out

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<sup>129</sup> GP Add Mss 44763, ff. 12-17.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 13-14.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 15.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 16.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 17. Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 231.

<sup>134</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 f. 15.

1. In matters of opinion is there opposition between authority and truth?
2. What are the rules of mental discipline in cases such as these?
3. How do we reach our conclusions in contested matters, including contested theological and religious matters?<sup>136</sup>

It is now that Gladstone turned for help to the book *On the Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion* (1849), by Sir George Cornwall Lewis. There is no conclusive reason why he turned to this book in particular. Bebbington has suggested that this may have resulted from the discussion of Lewis in John Henry Newman's *An Essay in the Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870).<sup>137</sup> Gladstone seems to have read Newman's work only partially before 1876 as he states in a letter to the Duke of Argyll in 1873. His diary records him reading Newman on 27 March 1870, the chapter on natural religion.<sup>138</sup> Newman's references to Lewis are in another part of the work. However, as they relate to the history of ancient Greece, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Gladstone noted these passages in his mind. His brother republished Lewis' book in 1875. Gladstone had made an in-depth study of it both reading and writing a memorandum from the 11 to the 23 September 1871.<sup>139</sup> Yet Gladstone's annotated copy is the 1849 edition. It (the 1875 edition) must have been still fresh enough in his mind in early 1876 to recommend it to a correspondent requesting clarification on Gladstone's theistic foundations. To this correspondent he says there is great value in the early chapters and that he believes Lewis wrong to think that his argument does not embrace religion or morals.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, however Gladstone came to be influenced, Lewis' book was of crucial significance.

Gladstone's manuscript notes are of two parts. Firstly a memorandum on Lewis dated 13 and 23 September 1871, followed by a detailed, annotated summary of the book. These recondite notes formed the basis of his published article in the first issue of the *Nineteenth Century* in March 1877. Hence, the memorandum or essay on authority is an essential prerequisite to understanding the full force of Gladstone's article.

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<sup>135</sup> See section on Butler.

<sup>136</sup> Gladstone, 'The Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion', *Gleanings*, Vol. III, 137-71, p. 137. Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century*, (March 1877).

<sup>137</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 231.

<sup>138</sup> GP Add Mss 44542 f. 189, Gladstone to Argyll, copy, 28 September 1873.

<sup>139</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 ff. 99-103. Memoranda dated 13 and 21 September 1871. The argument summarised by Gladstone as 'Authority. Opinion. Controversy with Sir J. Stephen'. Ff 108-118 is a detailed, annotated, summary of Lewis' book.

<sup>140</sup> GP Add Mss 44449 f. 7, Gladstone to Hardy, copy, 4 January 1876.



The memorandum is particularly concerned with the triple relationship of authority, reason and faith.<sup>141</sup> Analysing Lewis' definitions of 'fact' and 'opinion' Gladstone proceeds to discuss the nature of faith.<sup>142</sup> This resembles 'opinion' in that it is not a simple process of mental induction of the evidence, or, of something external to the evidence but necessary for its reasonable acceptance. However, faith also resembles 'fact' in that when it is fully formed within the mind it exhibits the characteristic of certainty. As described in Hebrews 11:1 faith is a spiritual insight: belief on the evidence of things not seen.<sup>143</sup>

Gladstone took the definition of authority in a slight amendment from Lewis', as "an immediate judgement or collection of judgements coming between the mind and the object and accepted as discharging the office of the mind in its stead. The reasonableness of authority depends upon the grounds of this acceptance".<sup>144</sup> It is interesting to note how Lewis had based his definition of authority on the Latin auctor, meaning the originator or creator of something.<sup>+</sup> Implicit in this is the idea that authority does not involve any immediate process of reasoning but is believed because the observer recognises the auctor to be a competent judge on the matter in dispute.<sup>145</sup> In other words, Gladstone is defending a concept of authority different in a vital sense from that of Lewis.

Lewis states "Whenever, in the course of this essay, I speak of the Principle of Authority, I shall understand [by it] the principle of adopting the belief of others, on a matter of opinion, *without* (my italics) reference to the particular grounds upon which the belief may rest".<sup>146</sup> Gladstone refers to the mind not the auctor as the referent of authority. Furthermore, unlike Lewis, Gladstone posited the specific criterion of reasonableness as involved in the ratiocination leading to authority. For Lewis, the

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<sup>141</sup> For instance, Gladstone noted the following argument. "Is faith analogous to other mental and moral experiences of man, comparable to other processes by which knowledge is attained and action governed; in its method starting from a similar basis, proceeding by similar steps, applying similar tests and arriving at similar mental results? If the answer is yes then faith, at least as far as its method and form is concerned, is a rational process". Taken from *Through Conversion to the Creed. Being and Account of the Reasonable Character of Religious Conviction. By W. H. Carnegie, Rector of Great Witley, Worcestershire*, (London, 1893), pp.38-9.

<sup>142</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 ff. 99-100 and 108; G. C. Lewis, *An Essay on the Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion*, (London, 1849), pp. 1-10.

<sup>143</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 f. 100. Memoranda on authority.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 101; Lewis, *Authority*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>+</sup> Auctor literally means "one who gives increase".

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

competency of the judgement of the auctor is the key.<sup>147</sup> For Gladstone, the reasonableness in the logical process is the key. In this light Fitzjames Stephen must be considered correct in attributing to Gladstone a fundamental misinterpretation of Lewis' argument on authority.<sup>148</sup>

Gladstone, anxious to use Lewis to defend the reasonableness of Christianity, introduces reason rather than competency as the test. No wonder then, Gladstone believed the antithesis between (what he believed was) authority and opinion was wrong. Opinion may be entertained upon authority, since authority has the *esse* or *natura* of reason even without the extra need of the competency of the auctor.<sup>149</sup> Both Lewis and Gladstone agreed that authority is accepted upon private judgement, but for differing reasons. For Gladstone this is because private judgement recognises the inherent process of reason in the formation of authority. For Lewis this is because private judgement recognises the inherent right to competency of the person professing authority. Reasonableness is the criterion of legitimacy for Gladstone (and not for Lewis) of authority.

In his published article, Gladstone appealed to the Latin *augeo* (to increase, to enrich) rather than auctor as the basis of authority, further highlighting the difference between him and Lewis.<sup>150</sup> This enabled Gladstone to see authority as something essentially added to facts or ideas, rather than as the creation of facts and ideas\* themselves. This further reinforces the distinction between authority being credible because involving origin through reason and Lewis' idea of credible authority being due to the competency of the investigator. There is nothing pedantic in the above discussion for it reveals a clue to the workings of Gladstone's mind. Even though he puts forward his view as based on a fair, if critical, reading of Lewis, in fact it had been formed by his antecedent purpose of using Lewis to defend orthodox Christianity. This is something Lewis specifically rejected in his analysis on the value of authority.<sup>151</sup>

Having recognised no logical antithesis between authority and opinion Gladstone contends that such "an antithesis between authority and truth is even more

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<sup>147</sup> Of course, Lewis means this also. However, it is ancillary to his purpose why authority ought to be accepted. He later gave the test of competency, something capable of being by-passed in Gladstone's definition.

<sup>148</sup> J. F. Stephen, 'Mr Gladstone and Sir George Lewis on Authority', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1, No II, (April 1877), pp. 270-97; see pp. 270 and 276.

<sup>149</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 f. 101. Memoranda on authority.

<sup>150</sup> Gladstone, *Influence of Authority*, pp. 139-40.

\* Gladstone defines ideas as "series of facts" in this argument.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Lewis, *Authority*, p. 97.



fallacious and unsound".<sup>152</sup> Authority, of itself, is not equivalent to truth but is a point of departure in the search for truth. "It is no more an opposite of truth than a candle is the opposite of an object which it may sufficiently, or insufficiently, illumine".<sup>153</sup>

He challenges Lewis' belief "that the formations of opinions by authority can never (except by indirect means) produce any increase or improvement of knowledge, or bring about the discovery of new truths".<sup>154</sup> Returning to an argument used in his letters to the Earl of Pembroke, Gladstone argues that as authority is based on reason it is also based on common sense.

I say that in all or in most subjects mankind has achieved a certain progress: and that by accepting, as a general rule, the progress already achieved, further progress i.e. new developments of truth, is more likely to be accomplished, than if, refusing to occupy the ground already made, we set about making [it] each of us...for ourselves.<sup>155</sup>

When it is borne in mind that for Gladstone all knowledge was probable, not complete or capable of mathematical verification, his argument on the validity of depending upon the testimony or authority of others was a strong one. Because reliance upon authority is capable of leading to new knowledge or wider vistas of understanding. Gladstone seems to be unaware that this is true only if his premises are sound and he is not guilty of a *petitio principii*. As a matter of philosophy, the debate on the nature of authority has a long pedigree. Cicero, in his *De Natura Deorum*, recognised that this subject was essential for any study of religion. However, Gladstone, who was familiar with the work,<sup>156</sup> comes up against Cicero's classic conundrum that,

So various and so contradictory are the opinions of the most learned men on this matter as to persuade one of the truth of the saying that philosophy is the child of ignorance: and that the philosophers of the academy have been wise in withholding their consent from any proposition that has not been proved. There is nothing worse than a hasty judgement, and nothing could be more unworthy of the dignity and integrity of a philosopher than uncritically to adopt a

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<sup>152</sup> GP Add Mss 44763 f. 101. Memoranda on authority.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 102. Quote from p. 89 of Lewis.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 102.

<sup>156</sup> Read, for example, December 1856, November 1857 and October 1870. See the digest of Cicero 1836-49 in GP Add Mss 44726 ff. 132, 149, 245, 249, 269 and 272, 44737 f. 224. Also quoted in *The State in Its Relations with the Church*, Volume I, p. 47.

false opinion or to maintain as certain some theory which has not been fully explored or understood.<sup>157</sup>

The fruit of Gladstone's labour ripened into another public controversy with Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, his foe over the previous issue of miracles. This was due to Gladstone's expansion of his notes on authority for a published defence of the sensibleness and credibility of Christianity. With an established methodology for defending authority Gladstone extended its trustworthiness from individuals to religious traditions. For the process of inquiry, testing, and advancement may through reformulation and elimination form a trustworthy 'traditive system' to which uninformed individuals may turn without impeaching the rules of reason or logic.<sup>158</sup>

Gladstone could do this because of his different grounding of authority to Lewis. The fourth chapter of Lewis' book, 'The Applicability of the Principle of Authority to Questions of Religion', contains the following: "In the preceding chapter a description has been given of the process by which, in scientific matters, an agreement of the competent judges, and consequently a body of trustworthy authority, is gradually formed...This description, however, is not applicable to religion, or at least only applicable to it in certain limits".<sup>159</sup> Because of the qualifier 'at least' in the last sentence Gladstone believed it legitimate to extend authority to religious systems (he means ultimately orthodox Christianity) upon the following premises, the first two of which both he and Lewis take as self-evident:

1. The consent of mankind has acknowledged as reasonable the existence of God.

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<sup>157</sup> Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, translated by H.C.P. McGregor, Book 1, Preface, p. 69, (Harmondsworth, 1972). See also GP Add Mss 44437 ff.17-18 Sir H. Holland to Gladstone 13 June 1873. Compare with C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony. A Philosophical Study*, (Oxford, 1992), especially pp. 46-148. Although a modern philosophical study, Coady's work examines the historical use of testimonial evidence. His basic conclusion is that trust in the word or authority of others is fundamental to the very idea of serious cognitive activity. His idea of testimony is similar to the idea of the definition of authority given by Lewis. Interestingly, Coady argues for an *a-priori* connection between testimony and reality. That is, one can gain direct, non-inferential knowledge from testimony/authority. This is because direct knowledge is not restricted to sense data since even direct observation depends upon assumptions given prior to testimony or authority. Thus, Gladstone (see below) was on to a good theoretical argument. His position is similar to Coady's when he rejects Locke's reliance on empiricism alone (in his discussion of the origins of knowledge) in his analysis of Butler's epistemological foundations.

<sup>158</sup> Gladstone, *Influence of Authority*, p. 146.

<sup>159</sup> Lewis, *Authority*, pp. 66-67, and 66-110.



2. The consent of civilised mankind (i.e. European Christendom) similarly binds us to the acceptance of Christianity.
3. However, this, in details, is not any one Church or dogmatic system. But in matters of opinion the corporate Church is more qualified to judge than any one of its members - therefore, the duty of any reasonable man in the question of authority in matters of opinion is to follow the best available opinion, i.e. that of religious tradition.<sup>160</sup>

The remainder of the article is Gladstone's defence, augmentation and application of the above theses to answer the following questions: What do we mean by belief in God? In addition, what do we mean by the acceptance of Christianity? Gladstone, in answer to the first question, argues *pace* Lewis that belief in God surely implies more than the belief that He is Superhuman and Imperceptible. Gladstone then lists a series of attributes that he feels Lewis would surely not have excluded.<sup>161</sup> Here is a fatal flaw. This is also applicable to his use of Butler (see above). Gladstone is engaged in a *tu quoque* argument. Part of his attack on philosophic theism and atheist or agnostic alternatives was (and will be referred to below in chapter three) that they depended upon illegitimate assumptions of nature, man and God.<sup>162</sup>

For notice in propositions 1 and 2 and his extension of the divine attributes he is basing his argument on unproven premises. Although he could plead the defence of logical probability, Gladstone is also appealing to what any 'reasonable' person would hold upon the Godhead. Presumably they stand upon the same grounds as for accepting the legitimacy of *Gladstone's* sense of authority as well as of inquiry.

In fact Gladstone states, "I take my departure, however, from the standing ground of the two propositions and do not go behind them, or argue with such as those who contend, in opposition to Lewis, that there is no just authority of consent in existence with respect either to the existence of God, or the acceptance of the Christian

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<sup>160</sup> Gladstone, *Influence of Authority*, p. 148.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. These include (a) infinitively high attributes conducive to excellence, indefinitely beyond the power of the human mind to comprehend or measure; (b) the upholding of moral and providential law. Generally there is a tendency towards virtue and happiness and an obverse of the opposite conditions. This, despite external appearance or indication; (c) this scheme extends to the entirety of the universe-thus it is impossible for any one person to comprehend this or cognisant problems, such as the origin and purpose of evil; and (d) the doctrine of a future state of humanity.

<sup>162</sup> This is, whatever their argumentative position, atheism and agnosticism must assume God or a Deity to argue against.



religion".<sup>163</sup> Surely this must limit the validity of his claims to believing Christians. Since, it is reasonable to suppose, most of those who had thought about the matter at all would already assume Christianity to be reasonable and accept ecclesiastical (or denominational) and dogmatic authority (to a varying degree). Then whom would Gladstone convince? Not atheists and agnostics as they would reject his prior assumptions. When combined with the knowledge that he uses a different idea of authority to that of Lewis, and extends it beyond Lewis's boundaries, it is unsurprising Gladstone's article came in for severe criticism from the forensic legal mind of Fitzjames Stephen. This is even without discussing the logic of Gladstone's extension of his view on authority to vindicate revelation, the sacraments, the Nicene and Apostles' creeds, Christian ethics, and the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, all of which he does in his article.<sup>164</sup>

If his views on these are examined in detail we find him defending Christianity (especially Christian morality) on utilitarian grounds and justifying Christian dogma on the basis of Johann Möhler's *Symbolik*: that in spite of the reformation there still remained a body of credal orthodox Christianity as much entitled to our consent as any other system of knowledge.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless Gladstone's admission could argue that there is no conception of Christianity *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, entitled to some respect of authority. Instead there are many varieties of Christianity not all as dogmatically embodied, as Gladstone believed.<sup>166</sup>

On the contrary, Gladstone argued, at the close of his article, "We are bound to act upon the best presumption, whether that presumption happens to rest on something done by others, or something we have done by ourselves...A general revolt, then, against authority, even in matters of opinion, is no childish or anile superstition, not to

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<sup>163</sup> Gladstone, *Influence of Authority*, p. 150.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-63.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162. See also Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 232. As Bebbington notes Gladstone made a similar point ten years later in 'Universitas Hominum; Or the Unity of History', *North American Review*, CXLV, No. 373, (December 1887), 589-602; p. 601n. Again he is defending an appeal to Christian testimony, despite the divisions of the previous centuries.

<sup>166</sup> This is precisely the point Lewis makes, see pp. 82-83 and 96-97. "The rule of faith laid down by Vincentius of Lirinum, in the fifth century, *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*, is inapplicable as a practical guide; because none of the distinctive tenets of the Christian sects - none of the doctrines which divide Christianity, answer this description. No article of faith has been held by all Christians, at all times and in all places. None combines the three attributes required by him, of universality, antiquity and agreement. If, in order to make this maxim applicable, we arbitrarily exclude a certain portion of those who have laid claim to the appellation of Christians; if we call certain sects heretical and schismatical and thus eliminate them from the aggregate body whose consent constitutes authority, then our reasoning proceeds in a circle".



be excused by the pretext that it is only due to the love of freedom cherished in excess".<sup>167</sup>

Amongst the Glynne-Gladstone papers are a number of contemporary critical responses to Gladstone's theories on authority. These are of varying quality and the statesman annotated only some. Ernest Belfort Bax scored an easy, if superficial, hit, by arguing that on Gladstone's theory first century Christians were in error by ignoring tradition and authority in the form of the gods of the Pantheon.<sup>168</sup> However in a sermon preached by Charles Voysey, an ex-Anglican 'theist' of some note, cracks appeared in Gladstone's logic. If the consent of mankind binds men to acknowledge the being of God, argues Voysey, then if that consent were withdrawn, would this equally bind us to deny the existence of God? Was Gladstone correct to assume that the consent of mankind is unchangeable? Why is it only the consent of civilised humanity that binds to some form of Christianity? Who is qualified to judge what this is and who judges the judge? More devastatingly, why should authority be linked to mere numbers or quantity. Are majorities the only guides to truth?<sup>169</sup>

Lord Acton, in a private letter, in response to Gladstone's proof copy criticises the implicit link of Christianity with utilitarianism, by warning the ex-premier

From that point of view I suspect your argument that a religion is tested by its effects on morality, might give rise to much controversy. If by morality you mean the lives of men, modern society has not much to boast of, compared, for instance, with the practical morality of the Essenes. If you mean the doctrines of men, it would be very difficult to show that the interval between the Ethics of Seneca and the Ethics of S. Ambrose could never have been bridged over by the progress and combination of Stoic, Alexandrian, and Chinese morality, as they stood, apart from the Gospel.<sup>170</sup>

Some of the most trenchant criticism, however, came again from Sir James Fitzjames Stephen via the meetings of the Metaphysical society. His published critical article against Gladstone was an expansion of a paper read at the meeting of March 13, 1877.

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<sup>167</sup> Gladstone, *Influence of Authority*, p. 169.

<sup>168</sup> GGP 1628, Ernest Belfort Bax, undated excerpt, *Public Opinion*, p. 359. March/April 1877?

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, GGP 1628. *Authority in Matters of Belief. A Sermon Preached at the Langham Hall, March, 4, 1877 by Rev. Charles Voysey*, pp. 3-6. Annotated by Gladstone.

<sup>170</sup> GP Add Mss 44093 f. 201 Acton to Gladstone 12 February 1877.

Gladstone did not attend the meeting, but an annotated circular paper is still in existence in the Glynne-Gladstone papers.<sup>171</sup>

At the meeting of the Metaphysical society, Fitzjames Stephen argued that Lewis (in contradistinction to Gladstone) was really positing the following argument: the observation about the acceptance of Christianity by all nations whose agreement on a matter of authority and opinion has weight stands alone and in contradiction to the rest of the book. Stephen thought it to have been a passing remark upon a subject that in the 1840s was treated in a very different mental climate from that of the late 1870s. Accordingly, says Stephen, Lewis argued at length that no general opinion on such matters of the nature and attributes of the deity exists or existed even amongst those experts possessed of competency. On page 70 of his book Lewis describes the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity as “the subtle, refined and abstruse metaphysical philosophy” of the later Greeks. This was then revised and reformulated by medieval scholasticism that Lewis declared on pages 370-71 was “a set of unsound doctrines”, the unsoundness being due to “the adoption of a defective scientific method...the unquering acceptance of first principles - false, indistinct and unverified” and to “reasoning deductively from propositions whose truth had not been established by proper preliminary processes”.<sup>172</sup>

In the published article (in the April 1877 *Nineteenth Century*), responding to Gladstone, Stephen asked how anyone could argue that the idea of God was the same in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Paul, Seneca, St. Augustine, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Paley, and DeMaistre. Persons who argued in the affirmative must have had no acquaintance with any of these persons' works.<sup>173</sup> However, the most devastating criticism came near to the end of the piece. This is where Stephen lampoons Gladstone's logical method converting Gladstone's enthymemes into a syllogism:

[Minor Premise] That which all mankind believes is true.

[Major Premise] But all mankind believes there is a God.

[Conclusion] Therefore it is true that there is a God.

If such an argument were sound, it would be useless; for unless the major premise is false that argument could never be addressed to any human being who did not already agree with the conclusion. If any less extensive major premise [e.g. that which two thirds of the human race believe is true or that which all competent judges believe is true,

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<sup>171</sup> GGP 1628. *Authority in Matters of Opinion. Metaphysical Society. To be read March 13 1877, at the Grosvenor Hotel, at 8.30pm.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4. The quotes are from Stephen's paper and are paraphrases from Lewis' book.

<sup>173</sup> Stephen, *Gladstone and Sir George Lewis on Authority*, pp. 282-83. See also Calaiaco, *Sir James Fitzjames Stephen*, pp. 188-89.



namely: that there is a God] were adopted, it would be impossible to prove the corresponding minor, to say nothing of the difficulty of proving the major itself.<sup>174</sup>

The debate continued with a reply by Gladstone in which he deals with the specific charges of Stephen and also renewed his basis for asserting that knowledge is not perfect and that authority is not absolute.

This discussion of the theoretical justification of Christianity undergone by Gladstone leads onto a prominent practical application of this in many of his literary jousts in the 1880s and 1890s with those espousing religious views less defined and coherent than he believed reasonable to concede. Unsurprisingly the roots of this can be found in the ramification of the debates of the Metaphysical society on authority and the spats with Fitzjames Stephen in the 1870s. These in turn seem to relate to a strand of thought found in his 1872 Liverpool College address. He told his audience of young students:

I wish to place on record my conviction that belief cannot now be defended by reticence, any more than by railing, or by any privileges and assumptions. Nor, again, can it be defended exclusively by its 'standing army' - by priests and ministers of religion. To them, I do not doubt, will fall the chief share of the burden, and of the honour, and of the victory. But we commit a fatal error if we allow this to become merely a professional question. It is the affair of all.<sup>175</sup>

He then went on to offer suggestions to combat the reckless novelty of speculation he thought characteristic of free thought. Instead, it was important to conduct the debate with sobriety of temper and sound intellectual habits. For Gladstone, the method of controversy as much as the argument was important.<sup>176</sup>

In this case Fitzjames Stephen's 1877 reply on authority revealed to Gladstone that Stephen was capable of error in the question of such method. In intellectual matters, the legal profession did not entail a superior technique of debating skill when comprehending the general habits of mind. "There is no profession, for example, more liable, as Mr Burke has noticed, to entail peculiarities of mental habit, than the distinguished and noble profession of an advocate".<sup>177</sup> Especially in religion and

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<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>175</sup> Gladstone, *Liverpool College Address*, p. 7.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29.

<sup>177</sup> Gladstone, *Rejoinder on Authority*, p. 178.

morality evidence cannot be dealt with as if it was under cross-examination in the courtroom.<sup>178</sup> On the question of competency, Gladstone denied Stephen's assertion that Lewis stated that with regard to the nature and attributes of God, for example, few men of competence have inquired and these few were in disagreement. Gladstone wrote:

He [Lewis] says, as to the Divine Power, there is a 'substantial recognition', and 'all nations have agreed' in it. No doubt he includes eminent individuals, but he does not recognise them in a monopoly, whereas Sir James Stephen still seems to be dealing with a list of witnesses in the box. Lewis has nowhere said that in a case of this kind the reasonings of the very select few are incapable of deriving corroboration from the many. A broad line does not separate in this matter the few from the many; as if we were separating witnesses for the prosecution from witnesses for the defence.<sup>179</sup>

Theology or morality is not like the science of pure mathematics or philology. Instead light is given to all people. Stephen's legal distinction between expert and non-expert witness is inapplicable. Unless we possess the intellectual apparatus to do so we take on trust, for the most part, the evidence presented for consideration by mathematicians and philologists. However in politics, religion and morality there is no such exact division between expert and non-expert. To suggest otherwise is to make the same mistake as T.H. Green in the sphere of learning. This is to become arrogant and assume that the methods of an educated, secular liberal elite are valid for all branches of knowledge, speculative and practical.<sup>180</sup> Because, the non-expert or average believer who has general (if undeveloped in a strictly scientific sense) knowledge is still entitled to speak. For when this knowledge is applied to specifics it gives, as St. Augustine and the Vincentian Canon note, a powerful tool in the armoury of the Church.<sup>181</sup>

### Conclusion.

In conclusion, what was the intellectual framework that underpinned Gladstone's mature apologetic?

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.



It is important to stress that Gladstone's fully-fledged position was the result of a mind in a dialectical and organic relationship with people, events and ideas. It was not the result of an accumulation and absorption of new information into a closed mental system. Hilton is correct to point out the value that a type of book such as Lord Lindsay's *Progression by Antagonism* (1846) may have had on the mind of Gladstone.<sup>182</sup> The significance of the framework explored in the first two chapters of this study is precisely to show that Gladstone's mature apologetic is a framework rather than a finely articulated set of doctrines. Ever the student of Butler, Gladstone's position was not isomorphic but fluid and predicated upon a methodology rather than specific content.

That is why it is important to realise the master key of his apologetic. This was a continual preoccupation with the nature of intellectual method. For Gladstone the rational use of the intellect was a vital part of the defence of Christianity, in addition to upholding the claims of revealed religion and the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Two intellectual influences from the 1840s refracted all of Gladstone's attempts to reconcile faith and reason and freedom and authority. These were Aristotle and Bishop Butler. Much of this effort took place against the need to reject unwarranted theological speculation and the need for a rationally cohesive epistemology.

Butler's doctrine of probability and Gladstone's dislike of reasoning conducted solely from first principles can be seen as a summation in the mind of Gladstone rather than a straightforward dependence. For it provided a rational and synergetic basis that enabled Gladstone to make use of a theory of knowledge that combined the virtues of Aristotelian induction with an idealist concept of a hierarchy of knowledge. By employing this, Gladstone hoped to free religion from charges of irrationality by elevating the role of the intellect without thereby undermining the need for reliance upon, and the truth claims of, divine revelation and the authority of ecclesiastical doctrine. However, this could leave Gladstone perched upon a tightrope in relation to his strictures on 'Vaticanism', its defence of authority and its usurpation of free inquiry and conscience.<sup>183</sup> In contrast, Gladstone argued for a concept of authority that both upheld freedom of thought and was rationally justifiable.

This method was applied with various degrees of intensity during the remainder of his public and private engagements on the reasoned defence of Christianity. Thus, the specific conclusions that Gladstone would reach in these encounters would certainly

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<sup>182</sup> Hilton, *Gladstone's Theological Politics*, p. 42 and *Age of Atonement*, pp. 349-50. See diary entry for 1 October 1846. *The Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 3, 1840-1847, p. 574.

<sup>183</sup> See, for example, Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, p. 118 and p. 232.

vary; but vary within a determined range of opinions. The fulcrum of these was a desire to do justice to faith and reason. The extent to which Gladstone achieved this in practice will be seen in the remainder of this study.



**PART TWO. The Apologetic in Practice.**

### CHAPTER THREE. THE ENGAGEMENT WITH UNBELIEF.

#### Introduction.

During the last three decades of his life, Gladstone devoted an enormous amount of time and energy thinking and reading about what has become known, somewhat amorphously, as the 'Victorian Crisis of Faith'. His forays into future punishment, science and the Bible can all be seen as the outer defences of the citadel of 'the City set on a hill': the fundamental belief in God's existence and the nature of religious belief. As a good 'Butlerian' and imbibber of Anglicanism, Gladstone did not undertake this task in any preconceived or systematic way. Rather, he enthusiastically responded to a number of literary challenges and was prompted to both reflection and action by his reading, correspondence and participation in contemporary debates, especially those associated with the *Nineteenth Century* and the intellectual elite it encompassed within its pages.

Whatever the merits or demerits of Gladstone's position, it shows that his encounter with unbelief was not a case of simple negative defence. Continuing the metaphor of the citadel of belief, it can be said that he did not retreat behind the walls and shut up the fortress to withstand the attack of enemies. Neither did he engage with the forces of doubt and rejection by a grand full frontal assault. If this failed it would have left him dangerously exposed and bereft of justification. Instead, he adopted a pragmatic and cunning strategy. This was the tactic of limited pre-conceived skirmishes, often on topics chosen by him and to an extent through which he could control the agenda. In this way unbelief could be seen off without the risk of a fatal battle. On the other hand even if the forces of unbelief could not be bested entirely, repeated attrition could sap their resources and their morale. It would demonstrate to the wider world not an intellectual admission that the battle was incapable of being won (which is a possibility on this reading), but that the forces of belief were not moribund. In addition, those of unbelief did not possess a unique monopoly of a rational and philosophically defensible position.

The problem facing the historian of Gladstone's later religious thought is to try and construct a coherent argument from the plethora of materials left by him on these topics. These ranged from the most abstruse metaphysical points on miracles, prayer and the nature of God to the most practical reflections on how to engage with scepticism and atheism. Indeed, it is surprising, given the amount of material and the obvious



importance of the topic, that much scholarship has badly neglected the role of Gladstone as Christian apologetical philosopher. Even Morley in his magisterial, if slightly hagiographical, biography wrote,

As to the problems of the metaphysician, Mr Gladstone showed little curiosity. Nor for abstract discussion in its highest shape - for the investigation of ultimate propositions - has he any of that power of subtle and ingenious reasoning which was often so extraordinary when he came to deal with the concrete, the historic, the demonstrable.<sup>1</sup>

This was not an isolated contemporary view. William Tuckwell, exploring 'Gladstone as Critic', in an otherwise positive picture of the statesman claimed that Gladstone approached apologetics clouded by his antecedent assumptions in favour of dogmatic Christianity.<sup>2</sup> D. C. Lathbury in a supplement to the Morley biography dealing specifically with Gladstone's religion simply dismisses this area with the remark that "Mr Gladstone is not seen at his best".<sup>3</sup>

In recent decades a rehabilitation of Gladstone's apologetics has begun. However, this has tended to focus on the more obvious, (and as far as evidence is concerned, easily obtainable) discussion on *Robert Elsmere* and Gladstone's Butler studies.<sup>4</sup> This examination has been enormously strengthened by the chapter on the battle of belief in David Bebbington's *The Mind of Gladstone*.<sup>5</sup> This chapter attempts to supplement and elucidate this analysis. In particular it draws on previously unused material and reassesses the more familiar evidence used by previous scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, Popular edition, Vol. 1, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> W. Tuckwell, 'Mr Gladstone as a Critic', in Sir W. Reid, (ed.), *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, p. 472.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Lathbury, *Mr Gladstone*, (London, 1907), p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew, *Gladstone*, especially pp. 624-25; Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister*, especially, pp. 474-75, 567-81. P. C. Erb, 'Politics and Theological Liberalism: William Gladstone and Mrs Humphry Ward', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 25, part 2, (June 2001), 158-72; S. Towheed, 'W. E. Gladstone's Reception of *Robert Elsmere*: A Critical Re-evaluation', *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 40, part 4, 389-97; W. S. Peterson, 'Gladstone's Review of *Robert Elsmere*: Some Unpublished Correspondence', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. XXI, No. 84 (1970), 442-61; W. S. Petersen, *Victorian Heretic. Mrs Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere*, (Leicester, 1976) and B. Lightman, 'Robert Elsmere and the Agnostic Crisis of faith', in R. J. Helmstadter and B. Lightman, (eds.), *Victorian Faith in Crisis. Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth Century Religious Belief*, (London, 1990), 283-311.

<sup>5</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 216-56.

In December 1881 Gladstone wrote a short memorandum entitled *Theol. A Grammar of Assent*. In it he outlines what he believes is required by reason in the matter of religious belief: namely the existence of God and a manifest divine revelation. He wrote,

All of which does not shut out important admissions. 1. The problem of the Universe and human life are unresolved and are apparently incapable of solution by human wit. 2. The whole of these propositions rest on probable evidence only; probable in various degrees, but all of them sufficient to oblige.<sup>6</sup>

It was painfully obvious to Gladstone that in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century there was a powerful and vocal challenge to such reasoning; reasoning which an increasing number of intelligent and thoughtful people did not consider self-demonstrative.

There are a number of ways in which this chapter could have been structured. The most obvious would have been a chronological approach. This has been eschewed in favour of a thematic approach. Why not chronological? A thematic approach has been adopted to analyse why Gladstone believed unbelief had become so prevalent, and what his criticisms were of a general, undefined, theism posited as an alternative. Within this framework, three distinct episodes can be seen in answer to the question of what Gladstone saw as the reasons for unbelief, and how this is related to his theoretical apologetics outlined in part one of this thesis. The episodic response by Gladstone conducted over an extended period had several common themes. Thus to avoid repetition, these episodes have been treated to a logical and thematic treatment.

However, if looked at chronologically, then certain points would be clear to the observer when compared with a broader thematic treatment. The periods 1873-1876, the mid 1880s and the early to mid 1890s all show a concentration in the published writings of Gladstone as apologist. These are roughly equivalent to periods when Gladstone was out of political office, and had more time to devote to public, intellectual, engagement with apologetics. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that Gladstone still read on theological and spiritual topics throughout the whole of the period studied in this thesis.

Within the topics chosen for examination in this chapter, however, there is chronological development. For example, on the reasons adduced by Gladstone for the increase in unbelief, the rise of a materialist worldview assumes a greater prominence in

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<sup>6</sup> GP Add MSS 44765 f. 166, 4 and 6 December 1881



the 1890s than the previous decade. The polemic against general theism as a credible alternative to Christianity shows that Gladstone engaged with this theme at various points throughout the last thirty years of his life; developing ideas originally given public expression in the early 1870s, for example at his speech to Liverpool College in December in 1872. A line of thought can be traced, furthermore, from Gladstone's 1876 article on the courses of religious thought, to the review of *Robert Elsmere* and the controversy with Colonel Ingersoll (both 1888). Interspersed between these public expressions, is a discussion of theism with correspondents such as Robert R. Suffield, and Cardinal Manning in the 1870s, and B. M. Malabari and Samuel Laing in the 1880s. It is perfectly reasonable to adopt a chronological approach to the subject of unbelief in the mind of Gladstone. To an extent, within the individual sections, this chapter does move backwards and forwards, where necessary, to trace development in Gladstone's reading and writing. Nonetheless large parts of the chapter are thematic in order to build up a coherent and broad picture, whilst still recognising the episodic nature in which Gladstone conducted much of his theological reflection.

### Reasons for unbelief.

It is therefore appropriate to begin this discussion by outlining what reasons Gladstone himself gave for the phenomena of unbelief that ranged from mild scepticism to dogmatic atheism. Bebbington has shown that as early as the 1840s Gladstone was perturbed by the rise of what he termed "infidelity".<sup>7</sup> So why did he wait until the 1870s before making a sustained attempt to combat the critics of Christianity?

In fact, as early as 1840 he had written in *Church Principles Considered in Their Results* of his concern at the spread of unbelief, "indicating symptoms of systematic preparation for the attack on all belief in Divine revelation". In 1845 he wrote (in a review of the life of Blanco White) about the sheer presumption and intellectual redundancy of agnosticism. He divulged to Sir Stafford Northcote in 1865: "I think our agreement goes one step further: we should both say the loss of faith is worse than the loss of Establishment (though many seem to hesitate about this). The only question remaining is, which danger is nearer? And here we seem to part company. I think the danger of the loss of faith has been coming on for over twenty or twenty five years - that is, ever since the breakdown of the Tractarian and the bold development of the

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<sup>7</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 128-29.

rationalising movement - with a fearful rapidity, and now impends like a cloud, of which we cannot indeed define the nearness, but we can see and can say that it is near".<sup>8</sup>

What was the crucial catalyst that made Gladstone engage in a sustained attempt to combat unbelief from the 1870s? In retrospect there were two primary causes. The first, as seen below, was the increasing truculence of unbelief. However, in commenting on the bias towards individualism in evangelicalism, the real choice, Gladstone argued, was narrowing between outright unbelief and the hankering after certainty in the Ultramontanist or Romanist system of religion. With the declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870 and the corresponding clash of allegiance between truth and the Papacy this was a disaster. The battle against Rome and unbelief was a common one in order to defend reformed English Catholicism. Gladstone's dislike of the individualism of the evangelicals was one pole of the spectrum in Anglicanism that ended at the other end in the proto-Romanising of the Tractarians (or as Gladstone now referred to them, the Ritualists).<sup>9</sup> Earlier in 1864 he warned Manning that in Italy

I profoundly desire that people may be kept in the position of Christian believers; and I am profoundly convinced that the exercise of Temporal Power in its present condition is working powerfully to thrust them out of that position...I much dread the effect of the provocation and the encouragement which, as I think, you are giving (most involuntarily) to the unbelieving power in Italy and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

The theme of post 1870 Roman Catholicism as a powerful aid to unbelief permeates a host of writings Gladstone undertook in the 1870s and is one of the chief reasons for the 'Vatican Decrees' controversy of 1874-1875.<sup>11</sup> In private Gladstone was even more candid as the beginning of a memorandum on the question of the 'Old Catholics' reveals:

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<sup>8</sup> See also an early reference on the need to engage unbelief in *Church Principles Considered in Their Results*, p. 514. See also, Gladstone, *Life of Blanco White*, Gleanings, Volume II, Personal and Literary, pp. 31-41 and Gladstone to Sir Stafford Northcote, 9 August 1865. Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume I, pp. 141-42.

<sup>9</sup> See Gladstone's 'The Evangelical Movement; its Parentage, Progress and Issue', *The British Quarterly Review*, July 1, (1879), pp. 1-26.

<sup>10</sup> Gladstone to Manning, 15 October 1864. Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume II, pp. 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> See also *Church Principles Considered in Their Results*, p. 105 and 'Soliloquium and Retrospect', *Later Gleaning; A New Series of Gleanings of Past Years. Volume VIII, Theological*, (London, 1896), pp. 393, 396 and 415.



1. The adoption of an erroneous proposition touching Christian belief, or circa fidem, by a Christian Church is a very serious matter at best.
2. Its adoption as de fide, as a thing to be believed for the necessity of salvation, is a thing far more serious.
3. But this act becomes tremendous in its consequences, when the particular Church, or Churches, however extended, claim the entire authority of the Church Universal.
4. And lastly when they teach as a matter of faith that the authority so claimed embraces infallibility in such a manner that the seal of infallibility is set to the proposition in question by its act of adoption. This is a repudiation and a breach of duty, in vital matter, to be repaired only by repentance. And this is the truth, in every word, with the dogma of Papal Infallibility recently adopted by the Vatican Council.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to being a practical stimulus to unbelief and a barrier to the ecumenical movement, infallibility was also a blatant and arrogant breach of the first principles of Aristotelian logic. To a student of Butler it was also manifestly irrational to claim certainty in the realm of religion. Unbelief could only increase if the Roman Catholic method of apologetic was, as Bebbington rightly highlights, one of "abandoning the twin appeal to reason and history in favour of a blatant assertion of authority".<sup>13</sup> At the time of the Vatican council Gladstone had written to Lord Acton "Ultramontanism and secularism are enemies in theory and intention, but the result of the former will be to increase the force & better the chances of the latter".<sup>14</sup>

He would later write in *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation*, that

Exaggerated doctrines of church power are among the real and serious dangers of the age; and that for those who think that against all forms, both of superstition and unbelief, one main preservative is to be found in maintaining the truth and authority of history, and the inestimable value of the historical spirit.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> GP Add Mss 44762 f. 134. Memorandum dated 30 September 1874. See also Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume II, p. 400 and *The Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 8, July 1871 - December 1874, pp. 530-32, entry for 3 September 1874.

<sup>13</sup> Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, p. 223. See also p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> GP Add Mss 44093 f. 97, Gladstone to Acton, 1 December 1869. See also Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Volume II p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation*, (London, 1874), pp. 13-14.

Five years later, also in public, he commented

In the final resort every system must be judged by its own inward conformity to the laws of truth and reason, not by the mode in which it is handled and applied by individual minds liable, even in the highest instances, both to patent and to hidden forms of error.<sup>16</sup>

It should come as no surprise, then, that in his first public declaration of a fight back Gladstone focussed on the topic of the distinction between what is science and what is religion whilst addressing the council of King's College in May 1872. In this speech he castigated those who, for example, upheld the Vatican decrees. They "seemed much to resemble the proclamation of a perpetual war against progress and the movement of the human mind".<sup>17</sup> Gladstone then widened the terms of debate in several similar speeches.

These were in two speeches delivered in Decembers 1872 and 1879, one as a rectoral address at Glasgow University, and the second, as we have seen, the famous speech at a prize-giving event at Liverpool College.

At Glasgow, Gladstone appealed to the dignity, the intellectual dignity, of the Christian ministry: "Thought is the citadel of knowledge". Knowledge, particularly the philosophies being proffered by specialists, was being abused by solecisms to extend beyond their own sphere to judge that of universal knowledge. Such knowledge that affected morality and led to scepticism would need to be combated by what Gladstone called "the four cardinal virtues of controversies": truth, charity, diligence and reverence.<sup>18</sup> Almost the same medicine had been prescribed at Gladstone's address at Liverpool in 1872.

In this address he told his hearers of "some of the thoroughly unsound intellectual habits which, it is strange to say, are more or less tolerated amongst those sometimes described as thinkers of the age, sometimes by other favourite and not less imposing titles".<sup>19</sup> Thus, one of the major causes of scepticism for Gladstone, was

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<sup>16</sup> Gladstone, *The Evangelical Movement*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Gladstone quoted from *The Guardian*, 22 May 1872 in Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, Popular edition, 1907, Volume II, p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> Morley, *Gladstone*, Vol. 2, p. 149.

<sup>19</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Address Delivered at the Distribution of Prizes in the Liverpool College, December 21, 1872. By the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, First Lord of the Treasury. With an Introduction and Illustrative Passages*, (London, 1873), p. 7.



intellectual faddism and a breakdown of intellectual method that infected society as a whole and produced the widespread vice of moral laxity and slackness.<sup>20</sup>

Gladstone illustrated this by an examination of D. F. Strauss' recent work *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube*, which he had read and extensively annotated for the occasion.<sup>21</sup> After summarising its thesis, that in the light of modern thought Christianity is obsolete and should be replaced by a speculative form of idealist philosophy, all of which he berates, Gladstone comments

These are not the ravings of a maniac; nor are they the mere dreams of an imaginative high-wrought enthusiast such as Comte appears to have been; they are the grave conclusions, after elaborate reasoning, of a learned, a calm; and, so far as form is concerned, of a sober-minded man, who in this very year has been commended to us, in England, by another apostle of modern thought as one of the men whose guidance we ought, if we are wise, to submit ourselves in matters of religious belief.<sup>22</sup>

The reckless novelty of speculation and unsound intellectual habits forming a cultural distemper amongst the intelligentsia and the 'upper ten thousand' is a prominent theme in Gladstone's later years. Modern biographers of Gladstone such as Matthew, Shannon and Jenkins have all noted the importance of this train of thought in Gladstone's polemic against the perceived cultural decline of Great Britain from the 1870s and in his anti-metropolitanism, which was in part associated in Gladstone's mind with intellectual and moral vacuity.<sup>23</sup> Further, as shall be shown, it is no coincidence

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> See reference below.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-26. *Der Alte und der Neue Glaube. Ein Bekenntniss von David Friederich Strauss, Zweite Auflage, Leipzig, Berlag von S. Hirzel, 1872.* [*The Old Faith and the New. A Confession by David Friederich Strauss. Authorised Translation from the Sixth edition by Mathilde Blind, Second edition, London, Asher and Co, 1873*]. Both editions are still at St. Deiniol's library, Hawarden. Gladstone read, according to his diary entries, Strauss in German on 1, 2, 9, 14, 15 and 16 of December 1872. However it seems highly likely that he used Blind's translation to help with the quotes from Strauss printed in the authorised report. Placed between pages 142 and 143 of Blind is a (undated) handwritten quotation of p. 163 of Blind (p. 140 of the German original). The German edition of Strauss is heavily annotated. Gladstone worked on the address from the 18-20 December 1872, remarking in his diary "Began to write an address for Saturday: with much flinching from the effort, worked long and late on preparing my address and delivered my address which lasted an hour as I meant". On December 4, 6 and 13 he also read W. R. Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872) and on 16 and 17 December he read Comte's *Catechism of Positive Religion*. These were two anti-theistic works also commented on during the speech.

<sup>23</sup> Gladstone, *Liverpool Address*, p. 25 - a reference to Willis' *Life of Spinoza*, p. 26, note. See also Matthew, pp. 65, 72, 238-39 and 255-57; Shannon, Vol. 2, pp. 144-50 and R. Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp.



that Gladstone took a German author and theologian as his example of the corrosive mental consequences that would result from an attempted false reconciliation of Christianity with modern thought. The idea of a 'false' reconciliation is important because as chapter two has shown the correct relation of Christianity to modern thought was of supreme importance to Gladstone.

This argument is elaborated and extended in several private memoranda of the 1890s, especially that of 19 November 1893: on the tendency of the age to concentrate on things seen over things unseen.<sup>24</sup> Gladstone begins by one of his favourite Butlerian controversial methods, analogy.

It is observed that the great epiphany of Glory to God in the Highest was appropriately made to shepherds on account of the character of their vocation. Their eyes became habitually familiar with the works of God: the glories of the heavens, the beauty and adjustments of the earth, the peaceful nature of the animals they tended. On the other hand, as this tending was their whole business, and as their supervision was general and commonly without distraction, the world made but slight calls upon them and left them largely free to ruminate if so minded, and even if not so given, still in an orderly condition of mental tranquillity. In their case, as compared with others, the balance was favourably struck between the demands of things that were seen, and opportunity for things that were not seen.

How differently the matter would have stood, had the sheep been animals endowed with strength but cursed with fierceness, and to destroying what they came near, to fighting among themselves, to making attacks upon other animals or upon the human race. The shepherd would then of necessity have been a man of occupied and anxious mind with little space in it left for other subjects than the daily, hourly, perhaps momentary demands of his calling. And how differently, on such a supposition, would the balance have been cast between the exigencies of things seen, and the opportunities for things unseen.<sup>25</sup>

Gladstone, then comments, "Now it appears to me, a change analogous to that which I have supposed to come upon the sheep, has actually been passing upon the environment and may or must ultimately reorder the mental habits and tempers or cast of men. But indeed, a change from quietness to violence, but one equally real and far

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412, 426-27. See also references in correspondence with Suffield below and Morley, *The Life of Gladstone*, Volume II, Gladstone to Mrs Gladstone, 9 May 1875.

<sup>24</sup> GP Add Mss 44775, ff. 246-51, 19 November 1873. See also 44775, ff. 237-41, 3 September 1893.

<sup>25</sup> GP Add Mss 44775, ff. 26-47.



more subtle: a change from the passive to the active, from the tranquil to the mobile, from the calm to the agitated atmosphere, from demands comparatively few and simple to demands numerous and complex, of things seen in their everlasting and I now think seriously dislocated competition with things unseen".<sup>26</sup> Part of the reason for all of this was the enormous increase in common, accessible knowledge - a deluge - causing a continual drain in "intellectual energy or brain force" with which to consider and defend the 'unseen things'. Whilst this may not have necessarily worked to the detriment of religion, still this movement was largely connected to a dislocation of mental and spiritual balance, often on the fulcrum of a crass materialism. "It seems to follow that whereas religion has always been engaged in carrying on an uphill struggle against the world within the region of the soul, the conditions of that struggle wholly hazardous being further seriously attended to her disadvantage".<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, as is made clear, there are equally important reasons in the mind of Gladstone for the rise and prevalence of unbelief. These can be grouped under the heading of the rise of materialism: leisure-time, pleasure and other diverting (and corrupting) amusements increasingly characteristic, thought Gladstone, of late Victorian Britain. Indeed, Gladstone linked materialism with intellectual slackness in his article *The Courses of Religious Thought*, (1876). This article was a rough theoretical attempt to delineate the contemporary theological scene with its alternatives. Gladstone grouped materialism along with, for example, positivism, agnosticism and atheism under the general heading of the 'negative school'. Although materialism is considered by Gladstone to be strictly a doctrine of philosophy, he still comments that,

I am afraid the phrase is appropriated by those who desire to express, in a form most crude and crass, the exclusion of Deity from the world and the mind of man, and from the government of his life; and the eventual descent into matter of all that now idly seems to our eyes to be above it. Such a materialism is the special danger of comfortable and money making times. The multiplication of the appliances of material and worldly life, and the increased command of them through the ever-mounting aggregate wealth in the favoured sections of society, silently but steadily tend to enfeeble in our minds the sense of dependence, and to efface the kindred sense of sin. On the other hand they are as steadily increasing the avenues of desire, and enhancing the absorbing effect of enjoyment. With this comes the

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 248.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 249-50.

deadening of the higher concept of existence, and the disposition to accept the lower, nay the lowest, one.<sup>28</sup>

Material wealth and its consequences, then, may provide for the cultivated intellectual elite but these could not be propagated or transmitted to society as a whole. They could not form the basis of an adequate moral system that could withstand the turbulence and strains of modern life. In the same way, all the negative alternatives to Christianity were equally condemned. For example, in his reading of *Natural Religion. By the author of "Ecce Homo"* (J. R. Seeley) Gladstone noted the following comment,

England surely is the country where the largest number of people lead, for mere superfluous wealth, a life that they themselves despise; the country where vocations are oftenest deliberately discharged or trifled with, where artists oftenest paint falsely and literary men write hastily for money, and where men born to be philosophers, or scientific discoverers, or moral reformers oftenest end ignominiously in large practice at the bar.<sup>29</sup>

Seeley went on to suggest that despite this art, science and culture in general make up the new religion and morality. Seeley commented: "it is [in] the growth of the doctrine and theory of culture in the modern world rather than any signs of reviving activity in religious bodies that we see the true revival of religion and the true antidote to secularity". In his copy of Seeley's book Gladstone has written repeated marks of disapprobation against such a view.<sup>30</sup> In a work entitled *Theism as Science* by Charles Voysey, Gladstone especially noted the following passage on the result of false thought, "...it will nevertheless do unspeakable injury and the worst of all evils; it will turn men into devils here, and, whenever its evil influences are left unrestrained, it makes a hell upon earth in the souls of all who are enslaved by it".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Gladstone, 'The Courses of Religious Thought', *Gleanings*, 1879, Vol. III, pp. 95-136, especially pp. 131-32. Reprinted from the *Contemporary Review*, 6 June (1876). See also 'Rejoinder on Authority in Matters of Opinion', *Gleanings*, (1879), Vol. III, pp. 175-215, especially p. 213. Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century*, (July 1876).

<sup>29</sup> *Natural Religion. By the Author of 'Ecce Homo'*, [J. R. Seeley], (London, 1882), p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, See pp. 141-45. Repeated marks of 'X'.

<sup>31</sup> *Theism as Science. Of Natural Theology and Natural Religion by the Rev. Charles Voysey, BA, St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. Formerly Vicar of Healaugh, Yorkshire, Minister of the Theistic Church*, (London, 1895), p. 108. Gladstone has written 'NB'.



By 1890, when he came to publish *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, the theme of materialism and increasing wealth and leisure assumed a paramount importance in Gladstone's mind as a cause and stimulus of unbelief. Gladstone, in this book, admits that in his considered view the causes of 'modern negation' are not only (or mainly) intellectual but also moral - as seen in 'fashionable opinion' - the result of increasing personal prosperity, comfort and luxury.<sup>32</sup> This scepticism is not the result of "the throes of struggle, sacrifice and strong conviction, but rather, like most of what we hold, an easy tenure (!) by descent through others, not from ourselves". The late nineteenth century was, in this respect, comparable to fifth-century B.C. Greece and the Roman Empire, "whose moral degradation was not less conspicuous than the intellectual splendour of the one, or of the constructive political genius, of the other".<sup>33</sup> He concludes by stating the chief danger of modern life is not the intellectual, scientific or critical excesses, nor the errors and culpability of Christians (although these are real and significant dangers) but "the increased force within us all which is sensuous and worldly that furnishes every sceptical argument, good, bad or indifferent, with an unseen ally, and that recruits many and many a disciple of negative teaching". It is a chain that ensnares the ill prepared and unobservant. It is also a course which leads from the Christian creed to the idols, fancies, shadows and phantoms of the age.<sup>34</sup>

There remains one more factor, in Gladstone's view, that accounts for the rise of scepticism: the failures and narrowness of Christian belief and practice (in addition to the corruption of 'Vaticanism'). There are two strands to this argument: one completely negative, and the second still negative in particulars but of more enduring value. These are stated most succinctly in a memorandum of May 1888 written in the aftermath of his engagement with Mrs Humphry Ward's sceptical novel *Robert Elsmere*:

The enormous contribution which positive religion has made towards generating the present scepticism may perhaps be classed under the following heads:

1. Exaggerations of statement and belief.
2. Sins.
3. Persecution and intolerance.
4. Offensive assumption of moral superiority.

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<sup>32</sup> Gladstone, *Impregnable Rock*, pp. 286-87. See also, Gladstone, 'Robert Elsmere: The Battle for Belief', *Later Gleanings*, Second edition, (1898), pp. 77-117, especially, p.106. Reprinted from *Nineteenth Century*, (May 1888).

<sup>33</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 287-89.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292-94.

5. Overvalue of position as compared with moral commands.<sup>35</sup>

In a memorandum dated 19 December 1881 called *Th. Idola Templi*, Gladstone expounded upon these items to include, for example, such failures as excommunication, papal infallibility, absolute inspiration of scripture and misreading of history.<sup>36</sup> He returned to them again in *Impregnable Rock* putting them into the context of Christian hypocrisy, especially moral hypocrisy. This was a legitimate and powerfully operative cause in the increase of unbelievers,

Whenever, under the idea of magnifying the grace or favour of God, we derogate from his immutable righteousness and justice; and whenever, in exalting the unspeakable mercy of His pardon, we unhinge its inseparable alliance with a profound and penetrating moral work in the creatures pardoned: then we draw down dangers upon the Christian system greater far than can ever be entailed upon it by its enemies.<sup>37</sup>

In another private essay written on 3 September 1893 discussing the things that militate against religion and God, Gladstone placed the insufficiency and failings of the Christian witness beside the moral difficulties of religion such as pain, waste, evil, death, and wickedness. Hence

In dealing with the problems presented to us by the presence of pain, Paley suggests to us that it is a happy world. An American writer, stripping the thought of its veil, thinks that he finds an adequate solution when treating the good and evil under the existing dispensation as a matter of account, or by way of debtor and creditor; he finds that there is more to set down on the credit side than on the side of debit. The insufficiency of these replies can hardly be doubted if they are intended to supply by their own force an explanation of the suggested difficulties and a vindication of the Divine methods in the government of the world.<sup>38</sup>

Three months later, Gladstone criticises those who have applied the thirteenth article of religion of the Church of England in an excessively narrow way: "... which according to

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<sup>35</sup> GP Add Mss 44773 f. 68, Rel. May. 88.

<sup>36</sup> GP Add Mss 44765 f. 170, 19 December 1881.

<sup>37</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp.283-84.

<sup>38</sup> GP Add Mss 44775, f. 240 3 September 1893.



the title of[,] would affirm that all works done 'before justification' have the nature of sin".<sup>39</sup> Here it is the case that the grace of Christ and the inspiration of His Spirit "may reach infinitely further than what we 'forensically' term justification...Take the Hymns recently published by Professor Newman. Our Blessed lord is alas studiously expurged from them; but it would (so far as could see) be absolutely profane to deny that they contain true piety".<sup>40</sup> Unbelief flourishes when the practitioners of Christianity become presumptuous and arrogant.

Thus, there may be a providential divine reason for the use of unbelief: to rebuke and chastise Christians. One of the earliest examples of this kind of argument is found in Gladstone's article in reply to the American unbeliever Colonel Robert Green Ingersoll in 1888.<sup>41</sup> This contention is not as explicit here as it was later to become. Gladstone first admits that the faults of Christianity and the rise of unbelief may have been due to a lack of Christian humility, modesty, charity and indulgence. Nevertheless,

that we may resolutely decline to be held bound to its tenets, or to consequences of tenets, which represent not the great Christendom of the past and present, but only some hole and corner of its vast organisation; and not the heavenly treasure, but the rest of the canker to which that treasure has been exposed through the incidents of its custody in earthen vessels.<sup>42</sup>

Two years later Gladstone is much more forthright in arguing this point

If we believe in providential government, we might rationally believe, even when we do not see, the boastful, and even the powerful agencies are not without their purposes, prefigured, and bounded too, by the counsels of God. It seems, however, not difficult to discern a portion of those purposes; which may have been, at first, to dispel the lethargy and stimulate the zeal of believers; and, secondly, to admonish their faith to keep terms with reason, by

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<sup>39</sup> GP Add Mss 44775, f. 258 Th. 31 December 1893.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 258-59.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) was the foremost political orator and freethinker of late Nineteenth Century North America and a formidable polemicist in the cause of secularism. He was trained as a lawyer and after the civil war became the first attorney general of Illinois in 1867. He was an early populariser of Darwinism and advocated the rights of women (including birth control) and African-Americans. Ingersoll corresponded with George Holyoake, and knew Charles Bradlaugh and G. W. Foote. Ingersoll Memorial committee: <http://www.secularhumanism.org/Ingersoll/bio.html> and American Atheists Inc. <http://www.atheists.org/Atheism/roots/Ingersoll/> by Madalyn Murray O'Hair.

<sup>42</sup> Gladstone, 'Ingersoll on Christianity', *Later Gleanings*, Second edition (1898), 118-58, especially pp. 119-20.

testing it in all its points; lest fancy, or pride, or indolence, or the intolerant spirit of sect and party, should have imported into their beliefs merely human elements that it may be both needful and difficult to eject.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, it is not difficult to see, contends Gladstone, why works such as Annie Besant's *Autobiography* may be useful to religion, not by virtue of their aims (here it was an attack on vicarious atonement), but by virtue of God's providence that shapes the whole of history in total independence, almost in spite, of the aims of unbelievers. For critics such as Mrs Besant are right to remind all believers that care and vigilance is to be employed not only against the enemy prowling around the citadel of Christ but believers/Christians as well lest the prowling provoke overreaction and thus an undermining of the citadel within. One must not clothe selfish passions and points scoring as the zeal for religion. Therefore there must be a careful and constant criticism over the forms of language in which Christian doctrine has to be stated and defended; and the application of a corrective pruning process on the temptation to excess, as well as to deal with the actual results of heresy.<sup>44</sup>

This is another crucial key to the mind of Gladstone the apologist. Rather than a direct and elaborate frontal assault on the quagmire of doubt and unbelief, it was far better to point out the inherent weaknesses in such positions, the internal imploding fractures contained within the very language and assumptions used with such licence by the scoffers of Christianity (in whatever forms they assumed). This is the same use of the Socratic method that Gladstone had used in debate with the Earl of Pembroke (see chapter two). Gladstone's method is to make his opponent confute himself or themselves by their own logic. It exposed the fallacy of unbelief - it claimed to know more than it did, to offer more than it could. It was no match for Christianity and its defenders. As Gladstone commented to Pembroke, "It is the more necessary to pursue some such method in this case, because the answers of the adventurer with reference to the word 'authority' and the word 'belief' shows that he does not study exactitude in the use of his Scientific terms; and without such exactitude no real progress can be made".<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 265.

<sup>44</sup> Gladstone, 'True and False Conceptions of the Atonement', *Later Gleanings*, Second edition, 1898, pp. 312-37, especially pp. 334-35. Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century*, (1894). See also Gladstone to Sir T. D. Acland, 3 December 1893, Lathbury, *Letters on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, Vol. II, p. 123.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 212.



The battle for belief could be won by a two-pronged attack: to expose the intellectual fissiparousness of unbelief in its very assumptions and to defend Christianity with a vigorous, and positive set of reasoned arguments. What these antecedent presuppositions consisted of will be shown below. As seen in chapter two the Earl of Pembroke's main fault had been "that at a time, and in a grave subject matter - in which he ought to be a learner, he has made himself a teacher. And I have so much confidence in his integrity and his ability combined, as to feel sure that if I do not win an entrance for this belief in his mind, it will be wholly my own fault".<sup>46</sup>

### How did Gladstone conduct his apologetical argument in relation to unbelief?

#### (i) Rejection of theism.

First of all he denied the increasing challenge, or method, of substituting a general belief in theism for orthodox Christianity. Writing to Archbishop Manning in 1872, Gladstone noted how in contemporary British society it was useless to denounce unbelief without first offering a solid, rational defence of belief.<sup>47</sup> Engaged in efforts a decade later to update William Palmer's *A Treatise of the Church of Christ* he wrote to Malcolm MacColl, in a letter subsequently published and widely circulated, of the need for

A setting forth, according to which the methods of theological science provides, of the *Civitas Dei*, the city set on a hill, the pillar and ground of truth, the Catholic and Apostolic Church, *Fortsetzung der Fleischwerdung*; exhibited, not as an argument against non-conformists, nor even principally against the aggressive Church of Rome, but as a positive dispensation, a form Divinely given to the religious idea, which challenges without authority, but agreeably to reason, the assent of rational and right-minded men, in competition with all other claimants on that assent. I want some solid, scientific work, which shall set up historical and institutional Christianity to take its chance in the *mêlée* of systems, dogmatic and undogmatic, revealed and unrevealed, particularist, pagan, secular, anti-theistic, or other, which marks the age.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 213.

<sup>47</sup> GP Add Mss 44250 f. 231 Gladstone to Manning, 19 May 1872. Copy by Gladstone.

<sup>48</sup> GP Add Mss 44244, ff. 193-94, MacColl to Gladstone, 20 November 1883. Prospectus sent by MacColl on the scheme to update Palmer's book, bearing a letter of endorsement from Gladstone.

Gladstone was aware of the metaphysical need of man as outlined by those unfriendly to Christianity. An example of this can be seen in his annotation of the following quote by Arthur Schopenhauer from his book *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, with NB II,

For the great majority, who cannot apply themselves to thought, religion very well supplies the place of metaphysics. If anything in the world is worth wishing for - so well worth wishing for that even the coarse and stupid herd, in their more reflective moments, would prize it beyond all gold and silver - it is that a ray of light should fall on them on the obscurity of our being, and that we should gain some explanation of the riddle of our existence.<sup>49</sup>

What was it that disqualified theism from acting as the guide? The answer to this is nowhere stated with such clarity and succinctness than in a letter to an ex-Dominican friar turned Unitarian minister, Robert Rudolph Suffield. It repays quoting at length:

For me, no idea that exists is free from difficulty. But it fills me with much sorrow, when a mind, seeking relief from them falls back from historical Christianity upon a naked theism. For not one of the serious difficulties which afflict or beset the human spirit in its search for truth, is thereby either escaped or mitigated. The great problems of sin and misery around and in us, of the moral inequality of conditions of an impaired and fettered free agency, of the dependence of one human being upon another, and so forth, all continue to stare him in the face.

While he carries forth with him - into the wilderness as I should say this mournful position of his inheritance, he leaves behind him the precious revelation of the God man, which has wrought in the world such vast reforms, and which imparts no new moral problem, only softening or partially interpreting the old.

I have really studied much on the early history of man: when I see what his powers, what manner and degree of development Greece gave to the human intelligence, how very far we are from any pretension to surpass, perhaps to reach her, and yet into what base and fresh degradation of the spirit she progressively descended. I marvel at the facility of self-deception with which a few, detracting themselves from all 'dogmatic sect' (?), launch that skiff upon the ocean, without apparatus of safety except the habits and traditions which historically Christianity has engendered and which fruits they sever from the tree perennially renewing them: and yet we are

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<sup>49</sup> Chapter 17, 'Ergänzungen zum erstenbuch', quoted in W. S. Lily, *The Great Enigma*, (London, 1892), p. 2.



sanguine enough to believe that their method is to bring about the dawn of some new and unexampled brightness in the future of humanity.

I often say to myself, and I am sure it is partially true - how good these men must be: how little their own experience can have told them of the awful battle between good and evil in the soul of man - how rosy is their interior - how little they need the restraint, aye the terrors of which they are denying the necessity for others, and destroying that force [which] Christianity beats down upon the mass of human wickedness at least like the wave upon the rock - Its security against detection and failure lies in this, that its ancient and signal failure has been forgotten and now since the Advent, it has not been, and never will be largely tried again.<sup>50</sup>

This argument appears to have been a favourite of Gladstone's as it is deployed on numerous occasions, public and private, such as the Oaths Bill speech in 1883<sup>51</sup> and against Mrs Humphry Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere*, both in his private correspondence and his public review. For example, he wrote to Mrs Ward in April 1888: "I do not say or think you 'attack' Christianity; but in proposing a substitute for it, reached by reduction and negation, I think (forgive me) you are dreaming the most visionary of all human dreams. Nor can I conceive by what mental process you come to think you can impugn

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<sup>50</sup> GP Add Mss 44318 ff. 243-44, Gladstone to Suffield, copy, 27 February 1876.

<sup>51</sup> The Oath's Bill, 26 April 1883, *Gladstone's Speeches. Descriptive Index and Bibliography*. By Arthur Tilney Bassett, (London, 1916), pp. 594-600: "You know well that from ancient times there have been sects and schools that have admitted in the abstract, just as freely as the Christian admits, the existence of a Deity, but who have held that, though Deity exist, yet of practical relations between Him and man there can be none [Gladstone now quoted Aristotle in Latin. {Lucretius also believed this}: 'Divinity exists in remote, inaccessible recesses of which we know nothing; but with us it has no dealing, with us it has no relation']...I do not hesitate to say that the specific form of irreligion, with which in educated society in this country you have to contend, and with respect to which you ought to be on your guard, is not blind atheism. That is a rare form of opinion, and seldom met with. But what is frequently met with is those various forms of opinion which teach us that the relation there be beyond and the visible scene, whatever there be beyond this short span of life, you know and can know nothing of it: and that it is a visionary and bootless undertaking to endeavour to establish relations with it. This is the specific mischief of the age. You would seek to admit Voltaire...But Voltaire was not a taciturn foe of Christianity. Nor was the author of that powerful and awful phrase that goes to the heart of every Christian - and goes, I believe, to the heart of many a man professing religion who is not a Christian - *écrasez l'infame*. Voltaire was a believer in God; he would not have had the slightest difficulty in taking the Oath; I hold, then, that this contention of our opponents is disparaging to religion; it is idle; and it is also highly irrational. For if you are to have a religious test...the test of Theism...it ought to be a test of well ascertained Theism; not a mere abstract idea dwelling in the air, and in the clouds, but a practical recognition of a Divine Governing Power, which will some day call all of us to account for every thought we conceive, and every word we utter".



the logic of Unitarianism".<sup>52</sup> Nine days earlier he had written to Acton, in private, that Mrs Ward's 'theism' was the least defensible of the alternative positions to Christianity. It was a paltry offering - perhaps theism with Christ glorified - but only as a human exemplar.<sup>53</sup>

Morally unsatisfactory (even retarded), how did theism fare philosophically and theologically when placed under the critical eye? Philosophic theism for Gladstone was simply the subjective instinct of the individual writ large in religion. It was a corrupted branch of induction unable to withstand the crucible of life unlike thought grounded in Butlerian logic. "He (the theist) inherited from no one, and no one will inherit from him". All the positive and valid deductions of theism were the result of a declension from Christianity.<sup>54</sup> Although this was often accompanied with a deep personal reverence for the moral and spiritual teachings of the man Jesus, its great weakness was that such belief lacked unity and coherence. It was especially suited to the financially well off, emotionally well-balanced and highly educated individual.<sup>55</sup> For Gladstone such an attenuated religious belief could never offer practical comfort to communities or groups.<sup>56</sup> The only analogous large-scale example of historical monotheism - Islam - would be unable to fill the void left by Christianity. Indeed Jewish monotheism only survived because of exceptional divine intervention.<sup>57</sup>

Gladstone was astute enough not to ignore what he called "the monotheism of the philosophic schools".<sup>58</sup> In 1876 these were dismissed as dry, abstract and unattractive. They were unable to meet the challenges of sin, pain and the limitations of free will.<sup>59</sup> By the late 1880s, however, Gladstone had softened his view, perhaps in the light of comments such as that received from Roger Hall in May 1888. Hall, an otherwise unknown correspondent, wrote to Gladstone in response to the latter's review of *Robert Elsmere*. He argued that Gladstone was wrong to insist that no classical (i.e. specifically Greek and/or Roman) system of philosophy could bring the human mind as near to the

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<sup>52</sup> In addition, Gladstone's article *Robert Elsmere*, p. 101-105. Pusey House, Gladstone to Ward, 10 April 1888, in Petersen, *Robert Elsmere: Some Unpublished Correspondence*, pp. 454-55.

<sup>53</sup> GP Add Mss 44094 ff. 15-16 Gladstone to Acton, copy, 1 April 1888.

<sup>54</sup> Gladstone, *Courses of Religious Thought*, pp. 121-22.

<sup>55</sup> Despite irreproachable and deeply respected thinkers such as James Martineau, Dr (B) Carpenter, Mr (W) Greg and Mr (S) Jevons.

<sup>56</sup> Gladstone, *Courses of Religious Thought*, p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

<sup>58</sup> See GP Add Mss 44093 f. 201 Acton to Gladstone, 12 February 1877.

<sup>59</sup> Gladstone, *Courses of Religious Thought*, p. 124.



divine as the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. "I ask this in all humility, as I cannot see how this can seriously be believed by one who knows all Plato's works".<sup>60</sup>

A month later Gladstone wrote in private

Granted that a platonic theism had in some minds become through the influence of Greek literature in Rome a preparation for Christianity. Must it not on the other hand be conceded that antipathy to the Jews, the only great and defined monotheism of the age, must have operated in an opposite direction, and probably over a much wider sphere.

And further that Stoic influence, largely prevalent at the time, was of very doubtful bearing in respect to monotheism, as the idea of a world-soul has an innate tendency to diverge from the personality which is the base of monotheism.<sup>61</sup>

A month earlier than even Hall, in April 1888, Lord Acton had written to remind Gladstone that it was unwise to discount the influence of Neo-Platonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism as a positive religious influence at the time that Christianity was taking root in Pagan society.<sup>62</sup> Acton commented

It is true that the prevailing philosophies were not wholly theistic, Epicureanism, of course, not at all. Stoicism, not in strict theory; but practically, by their use of ambiguous terms, their attention never to define what they meant by God, the Stoics helped theism. At first sight, everyone would take Cleanthes, Seneca, Epictetus, Antoninus for believers in one personal God. Tacitus even relates imperial miracles.<sup>63</sup>

The appeal to history to vindicate Christianity, another of Gladstone's favourite methods of apologetic was, as seen above in his strictures against 'Vaticanism', not as watertight as he often supposed. His memorandum in which he tried to by-pass potential problems was cut short by Acton's criticisms that still remain a valid comment upon his apologetical method.

The occasion of Hall's letter had been Gladstone's criticism of the insipid theism of Mrs Ward's novel in the May 1888 edition of *Nineteenth Century*. This article contained

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<sup>60</sup> GGP 1630, Unfolioed, R. Hall to Gladstone 14 May 1888.

<sup>61</sup> GP Add Mss 44773 f. 69, 15 June 1888.

<sup>62</sup> GP Add Mss 44094 f. 19 Acton to Gladstone, 1 April 1888.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 22.

a renewed attack on the philosophical problems of theism. Gladstone described theism as logically incoherent. Gladstone then switched to attack the theological problems associated with pure theism. For practical purposes it lay on the same road to outright negation. In contrast, the doctrines of the incarnation and atonement of Christ bridged the vastness separating the individual from God. Gladstone claimed that for the first time a (universal) law of human sympathy became directly available to all. Previously the innate human faculty for communion with God had been inappreciable and unapproachable. By this Gladstone meant that it had been previously unavailable in religions and philosophies outside of Jewish monotheism as espoused especially by Jesus of Nazareth. The advent of Christ, then, had brought not only an immeasurable spiritual boon but also a great philosophy.<sup>64</sup>

Theism was not a religiously beneficial substitute for Christianity. It abolished Scripture, the Church, the Priesthood, the ministry and theology. The great consolation of Christian prayer was excised.<sup>65</sup> All the organic, life-giving channels connecting man and God were severed. Gladstone argued that the rise of negation had bolstered Unitarianism. Yet even Mrs Ward described Unitarianism as wholly destitute of logic. "(I)n what respect she improves upon it I have not yet perceived". Because "(a) Christianity without Christ is no Christianity. And a Christ not divine is other than the Christ in whom the souls of Christians have habitually fed."<sup>66</sup> On more than one occasion Gladstone reverted to the "solemn voice of ages", the plea of one of Gladstone's mentors, St. Augustine: *securus judicat orbis terrarum*.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Mrs Ward's novel was "eminently an offspring of its time". The fallacy and dangers of a constricted Christianity infected even popular treatments of the defence of belief. Comparing the *caput mortuum* of the quasi-theistic 'New Christian Brotherhood' of Ward's *Elsmere* with *Christian Theology and Modern Scepticism*, (1872), Gladstone lamented to Acton, "the poor, thin, ineffectual production published with some arrogance by the Duke of Somerset, which found a quack remedy for difficulties for what he considered the impregnable citadel of belief in God".<sup>68</sup>

In this Edward Adolphus Seymour, twelfth Duke of Somerset and former free-trade cabinet colleague of Gladstone, attempted to combat the modern incubus of

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<sup>64</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, pp. 111 ff.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99, 101.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186; *Rejoinder on Authority*, p. 211.

<sup>68</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, f. 17 Gladstone to Acton, copy, 1 April 1888.



speculation and rejection of authority.<sup>69</sup> Gladstone must have read or been familiar with this work before his 1888 letter to Acton, despite it not being recorded in his diary entries. It must have been a salutatory warning of how not to conduct a defence of Christianity. For Seymour claimed the Gospels were not a record of actual events but idealised or poetical accounts, many of which were immoral and deliberate fraud.<sup>70</sup> How could one stave off atheism when the physical atonement of Christ was dismissed as a relic of idolatry and the teachings of St. Paul a mixture of Mosaisism and eastern dualism?<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, how could one reconcile the contention that faith in God is unbreakable but scepticism is an indispensable ingredient of modern faith?<sup>72</sup> Then, have the temerity to end with an appeal to Bishop Butler?<sup>73</sup> Here is, then, an example of the kind of reading that Gladstone found most objectionable: the wild speculation of an enemy within the fold.

Ultimately theism failed because it could not offer a plausible theodicy.<sup>74</sup> Of course, Gladstone was aware that the problem of pain, evil and suffering was one of the chief arguments used against Christianity by its assailants. He possessed enough sagacity to realise the great philosophical and moral problems posed by any attempt to construct a rational defence of God in the face of such problems. Criticising the American unbeliever Robert Ingersoll for exaggerating such difficulties did not prevent Gladstone from commenting that believers and upholders of revelation from Claudian to Cardinal Newman cannot and did not deny that the methods of divine government, as far as we can have experience of them, gave rise to many insoluble problems and

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<sup>69</sup> Duke of Somerset, *Christian Theology and Modern Scepticism*, (London, 1872), p. 4. For Somerset see Concise DNB, Vol. 111, N - Z, p. 2703. See also GGP 1631, 'The Duke of Somerset's Scepticism', *Exeter Gazette*, 26 January 1872. Review by Kentish Bracke. "The expectations that would naturally be formed of the Duke of Somerset's work are, however, doomed to some disappointment; for, whilst it is evidently the work of a thoughtful man, and no doubt depicts the mental condition of many besides the author, still the thought is shallow and the conclusions hasty, betokening an impatience of theological difficulties, and suggesting a suspicion that the handling is that of a novice. The style is intensely dogmatic...What is commonly known as the argument from silence is one of the chief weapons here employed by his Grace, as by assailants of scripture before him. It is a pretty safe assumption that, when the modern sceptic resorts to the use of this logical artifice, his cause must be desperately weak". Bracke also uses the words "feeble, self-satisfied, shallow, dogmatic and folly".

<sup>70</sup> Somerset, *Christian Theology and Modern Scepticism*, pp. 25 and 36.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid* pp. 102, 107 and 130.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147 and 168.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>74</sup> Compare with GP Add Mss 44525, ff. 45-47, Tollemache to Gladstone, 15 January 1897. Here, Tollemache argues that a strong sense of sin is not always unison with a strong capacity for righteous indignation. Voltaire, John Mill, Francis Newman and John Morley all possessed the latter and all seem to have had a stronger moral code than many Christians.



dilemmas.<sup>75</sup> For example, whereas rationally one views the providential government of the world based on free moral agency, this is not always the case as circumstances may reduce free will to almost a nullity.<sup>76</sup> As with common sense, so with respect to the demands of the intellect, it is facile and illogical to expect perfect understanding. It is more probable and more reasonable to expect that we as finite creatures of God with a limited and circumscribed access to the divine counsels of providence, are incapable of grasping, (or even fully appreciating when we do comprehend), the motives and thoughts which occur in the mind of God.<sup>77</sup> Even Christ, whilst on earth, did not reveal a perfected ethical code in all its multifaceted ramifications. This, in effect, would have belittled his followers and denied them the opportunity to find out how his ethical precepts were to be adapted to the ever changing situations of life.<sup>78</sup>

In its rejection of divine (scriptural) revelation philosophical theism dispensed with the limited resources of Christianity to deal with these tremendous problems. For much evil, pain and suffering is the result of deliberate human sinfulness. Moreover, much of this is attributable not only to original sin but human weakness, temptation and pressure.<sup>79</sup> Whether Christianity can deal with some of the gravest questions ever to trouble the human spirit is open to debate, suggests Gladstone in a private essay on circumstances that mitigate against belief in God and Christianity. However, it is clear from the above that for him theism is not fit for the task.<sup>80</sup>

To one correspondent, B. M. Malabari (of Bombay), Gladstone states that in this case he is content to rest with the statement of Bishop Butler. That is, the failure to solve a problem does not lead *ipso facto* to the argument that a solution is impossible.<sup>81</sup> In this letter Gladstone criticised the escape into agnosticism as a palliative to the problem of evil. Nevertheless, his remarks apply equally to intellectual theism, and seem to suggest as much:

I sometimes feel astonished at the thinness and poverty of material [with] which men sometimes think they can construct solutions of it [evil]. It is demonstrated that infinite series cannot be closed, and that the circle cannot be squared. It is not demonstrated that there

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<sup>75</sup> Gladstone, *Ingersoll*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>79</sup> See precisely the points annotated in *Voysey's Theism as Science*, pp. 29 and 36-38.

<sup>80</sup> GP Add Mss 44775 ff. 237-41 Theism, 3 September 1893.

<sup>81</sup> GP Add Mss 44507 ff. 71-72 Gladstone to Malabari, copy, 14 July 1889.



can be no solution of the problem, but I suppose it is clear that *none has yet been found* (my italics - i.e. no purely human solution).<sup>82</sup>

Thus it is interesting to note that Gladstone has marked with a cross of disapproval an argument by the author John Moore Capes, that if we cannot find some definition or concept of God's nature, it is useless to hide behind words such as 'mystery'. For these and other kindred concepts are according to Capes examples of intellectual suicide. If God is a total mystery, then logically the only avenue open to us is silence! Not so to Gladstone, the eminent Butlerian.<sup>83</sup>

Gladstone continued to take up the cudgels on this topic in the 1880s and 1890s. In his review of Mrs Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere*, he began by criticising the attempt to conduct philosophy or indict religion under the apparently benign guise of a romantic novel. Unlike the process of logic that must reason patiently, step by step, "the writer of the Romance, under the convenient necessity which his form imposes, skips in thought, over undefined distances, from stage to stage, as a bee from flower to flower. A creed may (as here) be accepted in a sentence, and then abandoned in a page". In what is actually a sly piece of propaganda the reader is left to supply the missing links in the reasoning process.<sup>84</sup>

(ii) The debate with Mrs Humphry Ward and Colonell Ingersoll: the case of the critics without a foundation.

Worse, much worse, is the method in which the theologico-philosophical position of Ward's work is developed in the principal character of Elsmere himself. Belief for him is entirely grounded in emotion. His struggle with unbelief is between intellect and emotion. In this the latter wins hands down. Gladstone is appalled that Ward's depiction of the evidence in favour of Christian belief is demolished almost without a word of defence, as if it was incapable of defence.<sup>85</sup> He is indignant that

A great creed, with the testimony of eighteen centuries at its back, cannot find an articulate word to say in its defence, and the downfall of the scheme of belief shatters also, and of right, the highly ordered

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 71.

<sup>83</sup> Capes, J. M, *What Can be Certainly Known of God and Jesus Christ? An Inquiry*, (London, 1880), p. 7, Gladstone has written 'X'.

<sup>84</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

[Christian marriage and family] that had nestled in the rectory of Murewell, as it still does in thousands of other English parsonages.<sup>86</sup>

Seen in the light of a man who had a lifelong adherence to the moral and Christian benefits of the indissolubility of marriage and a loathing of divorce and birth control, such a reckless handling in these issues became painfully, almost personally, aware to Gladstone.<sup>87</sup> Morally questionable, Mrs Ward's method was logically inconsistent. Having drunk deeply from the well of negative specialists, she signally failed to consult current or modern Christian apologists or the testimony of Christian history. Also, and what is more culpable, she took the scalpel to the bread of life contained in the Gospels and extracted merely a desiccated moral husk.<sup>88</sup> "Such deprecation is an infallible note of shallow and careless thinking, for it very generally implies an exaggerated and almost ludicrous estimate of the capacity and performances of the present generation, as compared with those which have proceeded it. Judges in our own cause, pleaders with nobody to reply, we take ample note of every comparative advantage we possess, but forget to register deteriorating and disqualifying influences. Not less commonly is our offence avenged by our inconsistency".<sup>89</sup>

In the same year as this stinging rebuke Gladstone took on the American freethinker Robert Ingersoll. Ingersoll wrote, according to Gladstone, as if the local colouring of a particular and very limited section of Christianity represented the views of the whole. His method was one of simple denunciation, sarcasm and invective. Eschewing reasoned and sustained argument, Ingersoll was no inquirer after the truth such as Pascal had been in his *Provincial Letters*. Ingersoll was a soldier without aim or tactic, dashing around the battlefield full of sound and fury yet signifying nothing.<sup>90</sup>

What principally riled Gladstone was that Ingersoll took for granted that Christians would automatically approve of the sacrifice of Jephthah, as recorded in the Old Testament. Ingersoll's method was hardly applicable to the grave and weighty subject

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>87</sup> See Matthew, *Gladstone*, pp. 161, 248, 339, 576 and 586n for divorce; and 90, 569, 571 and 576 for what Gladstone recorded in his diary for 28 October 1888 "the most saddening and sickening of subjects [birth control]". See also Shannon, *Gladstone: Peel's Inheritor 1809-1865*, pp. 340 and 343-45 on divorce. See also the new Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry on Gladstone by H. C. G. Matthew. Matthew comments, "He violently deplored birth control and contemplated a public crusade against it". ODNB, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 50. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10787>

<sup>88</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, p. 99.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>90</sup> Gladstone, *Ingersoll*, pp. 119-22.



matter. Indeed, it was more suitable to placards at an election meeting than a considerate and careful exercise of judgement. There was nothing to stop any Christian from condemning and disassociating themselves from the act of Jephthah. If Ingersoll had not been clouded by his *a priori* arguments against scripture he would have realised that the actual Biblical account no more sanctioned the act of sacrifice than the falsehood of Abraham in Egypt or St. Peter in the case of Judaic converts. Furthermore, why does Ingersoll assume an explicit apostolic sanction for Jephthah's act from the writer of Hebrews 11.32? Jephthah is not praised because of this. His name appears with Gideon, Barach and Sampson as warriors who performed great acts of faith and patriotism against the enemies of Israel. All had committed errors. Yet "(n)o one supposes that any of the others are honoured by mention on account of his sin or error: why should that supposition be made in the case of Jephthah, at the cost of all ordinary rules of investigation".<sup>91</sup>

Ingersoll displayed the same faulty method *mutatis mutandi* in respect to Abraham's attempted sacrifice. In Gladstone's opinion it was the most basic historical anachronism to judge the events of the past in the light of the present Christian dispensation. Given the morality of Abraham's age, a morality progressively enfolded by God's revelation, this was a "simple (act of) obedience to a superior whom there is every good ground to trust". Bearing in mind Gladstone's epistemology (the limits of objective fact-knowledge), to judge Abraham as Ingersoll does is a breach of the first principles of logic. He is illogical because he is not following Aristotelian logic.<sup>92</sup>

Even more philosophically retrograde for Gladstone was Ingersoll's contention that people are not responsible for the beliefs they hold. No, said Gladstone, in the formation of belief will and intellect do interact. Effectively, he claimed Ingersoll was contending that we believe or disbelieve on account of evidence alone (and he meant demonstrative, not the probable evidence of Butler). His position was one of pure empiricism. There is no room for conscience, emotion, will or moral feeling. Consequently belief or disbelief cannot be the proper subject of praise or blame. Despite this Ingersoll denounced future retribution not as an "error of errors" but as an "infamy of infamies". Surely, Gladstone alleged, a *non sequitur*. How can the mind drink from such a fountain of sweetness and bitterness intermixed? Mental processes are not

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-33. See J. B. Mozley's lectures on the Old Testament (1877) from which it is likely Gladstone derived much of his argument here.

automatic: they may be influenced by will, passion, habits, etc... In this way religion is no different. By implication our beliefs are subject to praise or blame on philosophical as well as moral grounds.<sup>93</sup>

This did not stop critics of Gladstone from complaining of "the ecclesiastically minded Oxford student, who is almost colour blind to modern science, and who revels in antiquated questions of Church history, and in subtle disquisitions and mystical rhetoric worthy of a doctor of the Middle Ages". Samuel Laing's review (from which the preceding quote is taken) urged his readers to realise that Gladstone fell foul of the same fallacy as Butler. Both came perilously close to the logic of agnosticism. For if Gladstone proposed partial or total ignorance of objective fact-knowledge, this could form no basis for any obligation to believe. Unless, of course, one assumed the sanction of a divine revelation contained in the Bible.<sup>94</sup> G. W. Foote, editor of the secularist *The Freethinker*, lampooned Gladstone's moral argument in defence of Abraham. "Gladstone's answer is just this: 'They all did it'. That may cover Abraham, but how can it cover Jehovah?" Especially as the Old Testament described Abraham as 'friend of God'.<sup>95</sup> As to Gladstone's philosophy, Foote used the following syllogism:

1. Belief is partially dependent on the will of the person
2. A person's will contains error and honesty that are incompatible
3. Therefore, belief cannot be dependent upon the will.
4. Conclusion: *ergo* Gladstone's argument is shattered.<sup>96</sup>

(iii) The debate with Huxley-Gladstone's apologetical bête noire.

The most celebrated methodological spat occurred with Huxley over the issue of the Gadarene Swine story in the synoptic Gospels in late 1890 and early 1891. As with the debate with Ingersoll, Gladstone was drawn into combat on a topic already under discussion. Huxley had begun the controversy in his February 1889 article in the *Nineteenth Century* on agnosticism. In this Huxley had argued, on the basis of the testimony provided by the synoptic Gospels, that Christ acted immorally and illegally in

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-55.

<sup>94</sup> GGP 1630 Samuel Laing, 'Mr Gladstone and Colonel Ingersoll', *The Agnostic Journal*, (?) 1888, pp. 3 and 9.

<sup>95</sup> GGP 1630 G. W. Foote, *The Freethinker*, Vol. III, No. 26, 24 June 1888, p. 199.

<sup>96</sup> GGP 1630 G. W. Foote, *The Freethinker*, Vol. III, No. 27, 1 July 1888, p. 208.



the destruction of other people's property. Henry Wace, principal of King's College, London, had then answered this.<sup>97</sup>

Earlier Huxley had criticised the authors of *Lux Mundi* for trying to defend belief against scientific weapons of precision with the old fashioned artillery of the Church. Gladstone, writing in *Good Words* (later republished in his *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, expanded in the Second edition of 1892), argued against Huxley. James Knowles, the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, offered the chance to review Gladstone's book to Huxley. This became Huxley's December 1890 article, 'The Keepers of the Herd of Swine'. Gladstone, wishing to respond, wrote to Knowles and was invited to write his own reply. This was 'Professor Huxley and the Swine Miracle', January 1891. Huxley's final reply came in the same journal's March issue, 'Illustrations of Mr Gladstone's Controversial Methods'.<sup>98</sup>

Gladstone entered into the fray in order to take up Huxley's riposte against the authors of *Lux Mundi*. To him Huxley's answer had oscillated between pity and good-natured contempt. Having previously fought Huxley over the book of Genesis, Gladstone was angry at his repeated charge of the redundancy of Christian thought.

I demur entirely to the statement of Professor Huxley. I deny that the weapons of belief are antiquated: I pause even before admitting that those of scientific men are always, except in their own particular sciences, weapons of precision. When we decline the appeal to the established facts of science, or to the conclusions upheld or reasonably sustained by human experience through history, or when we fall into that trap laid for us by Hume, and treat the acceptance of our 'Holy Religion' as a matter no way amenable to the view of reason; then we may be justly charged with the use of weapons never worthy, and no longer serviceable. But until then, we may quietly endeavour to proceed as rational beings upon rational considerations.<sup>99</sup>

In defence of the actual account of the Gadarene swine miracle Gladstone discussed (wrongly in fact) the point that Huxley said that Jesus had acted unlawfully in the destruction of the pigs. (He later apologised to Huxley for this - as the professor had

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<sup>97</sup> See 'Agnosticism', *Nineteenth Century*, (February 1889), pp. 171-72.

<sup>98</sup> P. Metcalf, *James Knowles. Victorian Editor and Architect*, (Oxford, 1990), pp. 329-33.

<sup>99</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, Second edition, pp. 266-67.

only written that the Gospel writer produced evidence that could be taken to show that Jesus had acted immorally).<sup>100</sup>

To Gladstone the entirely reasonable and necessary answer of demoniacal possession of pigs was that Jesus punished a breach of the Mosaic Law that prohibited the eating of Pork. However, Gladstone seems to assume that his reading of the evidence substantiates his case. Yet he never quoted his authorities for much of this argument and even in those he did adduce, e.g. the Jewish historian Josephus, he does not show how he reached the conclusions drawn from him.<sup>101</sup>

Huxley had little difficulty in castigating his opponent's lack of critical expertise in the evaluation of his evidence. Similar to Huxley's earlier charge on Gladstone's reliance upon the outdated authorities of Herschel and Cuvier in natural science, Huxley commented that Gladstone depended upon Josephus and other "antiquated Episcopal authorities [Bishop Wordsworth and Archbishop Trench]". Tellingly Huxley made use of some of the latest German scholarship e.g. Schürer's *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Christi* to argue that Gadara was a Greek city. If Gladstone had used Josephus factually instead of polemically, Huxley insisted, he would have realised that even Josephus regarded Gadara just as much a Hellenic city as Ptolemais. Thus it was Gladstone who lacked the precise methodological exactness, preferring to use "rhetorical tomahawks" instead. Regardless of whether the swineherds were Jewish or Gentile, the law in Gadara was that of the Roman province of Syria. There was, thus, no evidence to substantiate Gladstone's belief that the pig owners were transgressing the Jewish law. Huxley claimed to out manoeuvre Gladstone through utilising only the strict methods of induction. Either there was no miracle or the Gospel account was false. In either case the credibility of Christianity was undermined.<sup>102</sup>

Huxley's article was a powerful critique. Gladstone, unembarrassed, determined a reply. He was exasperated that the private judgement of an individual can be said to have authority to utterly reject the Gospel witness and hence the Christ of the Gospel.<sup>103</sup> This rejection by Huxley was simply the result of agnostic presuppositions and not an

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<sup>100</sup> See note 98 for Metcalf.

<sup>101</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, Second edition, pp. 274-79.

<sup>102</sup> T. H. Huxley, 'The Keepers of the Herd of Swine', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 166, (December 1890), 967-99.

<sup>103</sup> Gladstone, 'Professor Huxley and the Swine Miracle', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXIX, No. 168, (February 1891), 339-58, p. 340.



argument of, or from, sound criticism. The synoptic Gospels are the only contemporary and detailed historical source for the events in question.<sup>104</sup>

Gladstone went on to argue that it was Huxley, not himself, who had used a distorted reading of Josephus. It was easy to isolate one or two of Josephus' remarks to substantiate a preconceived conclusion. Gladstone then provided a more detailed and referenced analysis of the Jewish chronicler to argue that Gadara was Jewish and not a Hellenic city. The master fallacy of Huxley was to assume that in Josephus all that was anti-Roman was Jewish and could not have been Gentile. Gladstone went on to claim that Schürer's '*Geschichte des Jüdischen*' had altered the meaning of Josephus and was consequently unreliable as an authority.<sup>105</sup> The rest of the article used Josephus and Strabo to claim that in terms of probability the balance favoured Gadara as a Jewish city subject to Mosaic Law. This was the key for Gladstone. He only had to demonstrate that his reading was the most probable to maintain his original argument in defence of Christ's character and the synoptic Gospels as the carrier of divine revelation.<sup>106</sup> This was practical Butlerianism in action against the pretensions of Huxley for scientific exactitude.

If Gladstone thought he had defeated or silenced Huxley on the basis of probable evidence he was mistaken.<sup>107</sup> Significantly entitled '*Illustrations of Mr Gladstone's Controversial Methods*', Huxley's article completely, and to devastating effect, turned the table on Gladstone. Where in the Mosaic Law is the rule that the possession of pigs and the occupation of a swineherd is illegal, rather than simply an offence to ultra-orthodox first century Jews? The Law of Moses overturned Gladstone the "rabbinical reconciler".

Even if the possession of pigs had been illegal the synoptic Gospels contain no evidence to suggest that the killing of the pigs was a form of punishment. Rather it was the consequence of diabolic suggestion. Besides if Gladstone admitted that the government of Gadara was gentile and its wealthy inhabitants, *ipso facto* the law was

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342 and 346 ff.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347-56.

<sup>107</sup> See the following correspondence in the Huxley papers. HC XVI, 75, 01134, Henry Field to Huxley 8 February 1891; HC XVII, 154, 01543, Richard Simpson Gundry to Huxley 6 March 1889; HC XXI, 190, 02701, W. E. H. Lecky to Huxley 3 December 1890. For example, G. A. Kendall, writing on 6 April 1889 [HC XIX, 127, 02399] provided the following amusing anecdote: [paraphrased] Around 1853 Brundenell Barter preached a sermon on the eve of St. Bartholomew to the undergraduates of Oxford on the prevalence of vice and immorality in very young people. He argued an old opinion that this precocity was caused by demoniacal possession. Soon afterwards the Bishop of Oxford delivered a charge to his clergy whence he took the same ground and insisted upon the necessity of reviving the rite of exorcism and appropriating a cadre of priests in a separate order to perform these. This is to show that in opposing Gladstone in the belief in the Gadarene swine, Huxley is not flogging a dead horse!



gentile. In addition, can Gladstone claim to speak with an authority equal to the rank of scholars such as Schürer? If not then the argument from probability was inconclusive. Lastly, Gladstone had adopted a naïve and uncritical reading of the synoptic Gospels regarding this miracle story. Historical-critical methods had demonstrated these were not three independently witnessed stories but a single incident founded upon a common source. Again Gladstone stood convicted of a *tu quoque* argument because of his weakness in terms of New Testament criticism as seen in chapter one. He was guilty of “theological prepossessions”. If contemporary evidence alone was the conclusive criterion, then what of the contemporary, but, fantastic legends of miracles recorded in the middle ages?<sup>108</sup>

Huxley ended by urging Gladstone to heed his own strictures on method. For a politician was poorly served by “rhetorical artifices” that had long ceased to influence those in the regions of “letters and science”. For these, “the mere dexterity in putting together cleverly ambiguous phrases and even the great art of offensive misrepresentation, are unspeakably wearisome”.<sup>109</sup>

### Conclusion.

Historians when presented with an examination of Gladstone’s intellectual vindication of Christian belief are faced with a mind characterised by optimism and openness. If Christianity was engaged in a battle with unbelief then, for Gladstone, defeat was far from a forgone conclusion. In defending positive Christian teaching he went into the heart of the enemy’s territory. He was not content to rest with a purely negative withdrawal behind the strong walls of the citadel of faith. Such can be seen, for example, in his self-issued challenge or demand to the agnostic Samuel Laing, resulting from his article on Ingersoll in 1888. This was a petition to Laing to define exactly what the ‘negative creed’ was. “The positive writer is liable to be told that after he has done

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<sup>108</sup> T. H. Huxley, ‘Illustrations of Mr Gladstone’s Controversial Methods’, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXIX, No. 169, (March 1891), 455-67.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145. Notice how the Duke of Argyll is writing to Gladstone at this time to complain that it is unwise of him to engage Huxley on this relatively unimportant topic in the battle for belief. GP Add Mss 44103 ff. 226-28, 29 December 1890 and ff. 229-30, 1 February 1891. For example, f. 226, “... to express a hope that you will not lay too much stress on any mistake Huxley may have made about the Gadarene Swine and the Gadarene nationality. It is a question I am incompetent to deal with. But I have an uncomfortable feeling that alto’ Huxley may be quite wrong in that matter, it is not one which will affect objectors much”.



his best to deliver his blow, that he is cutting through a ghost and not a real antagonist".<sup>110</sup>

Whether Gladstone was outlining his views on the reasons for unbelief, or was rejecting a general theism as invalid, or was providing a positive alternative view via correct method, authority, probability and analogy, a common theme emerges. Christianity ought to be judged by its fruits. These were plain for all believers to see and all believers had a legitimate voice in their defence.<sup>111</sup> It was simple arrogance for a tiny coterie of the self-lauded secular, liberal intelligentsia to dictate to the mass of Christians what they ought and ought not to believe. As we have seen the watchword constantly in the mind of Gladstone was *securus judicat orbis terrarum*. This would and could never be replaced by the irrational fictions of intellectual faddism, empty theistic platitudes or gross materialism.

This reasoning would determine the kind of clerisy that Gladstone would appeal to. He wished to uphold the unity of wisdom - of faith and reason against the corrosive specialisation of discrete subjects emerging in the professional and academic world of the late nineteenth century. Consequently when H. W. Acland lauded Gladstone as 'a chief force in modern progress', Gladstone replied,

Do you think any man can safely say that the individual human being is advancing? I have no doubt he advances in certain respects. But his gains in one direction may be balanced by his losses in another.

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<sup>110</sup> GP Add Mss 44504 f. 190 Gladstone to Samuel Laing, copy, 17 August 1888.

<sup>111</sup> Gladstone, *Robert Elsmere*, pp. 99 and 107; *Universitas Hominum*, p. 594; *IR*, pp. 288-89. GP Add Mss 44792 ff. 24-25 undated memorandum. See Gladstone to Antonio Panizzi, 8 February 1874 in Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of W. E. Gladstone*, Vol. II, p. 99 and GP Add Mss 44274 f. 377 undated memorandum (c. 1874 or 1888) by Gladstone. It is worth writing this out in full.

Christianity abolished

1. Gladiatorial shows
2. Human Sacrifices
3. Polygamy
4. Exposure of Children
5. Slavery
6. Cannibalism

Christianity drove into the shade all unnatural lusts and even all irregular appetites.

Christianity established

1. peace as the normal relations between nations
2. the duty of relieving the poor
3. generally speaking the moral and social equality of women

It taught the law of mutual love: it proscribed all manner of sin. But the preceding notes refer to what besides saying, it did. And, in every one of these instances except cannibalism, what it did was in contrast not with the barbarous but with the highly civilised life, as it was exhibited by the Romans, Greeks of the most famous ages or both.

And there is one cause in action over the whole field of knowledge, which has a powerful tendency to reduce his dimensions. I mean that we are all coming to be specialists. In your own great profession, I think they are not rated high: and so I believe it will be all along the line.<sup>112</sup>

He also complained to Lord Acton about the fallacies of 'specialising tendencies & necessities'.<sup>113</sup> The crux of the matter for understanding Gladstone's later religious thought is to be reminded of his letter to Archbishop Manning in 1869. Religious doctrine had to be able to find a space within a synoptic vision of the understanding of the mind. This was one that included the rational as well as the emotional side to thought. It is also crucial to be reminded, once again, that Gladstone's method was dialectical. This was an attempt to transcend the dissipation of knowledge and the crassness of unfounded speculation by providing a high and correct standard of methodological operation. This applied not only to theology, or intellectual matters in general, but also to such second order activities as politics and public service. This method was based on Aristotelian induction and Butler's doctrine of probability.

Butler was the philosopher for Gladstone that had the supreme merit of resting his entire argument on the basis of human experience. This gave rise to the cardinal virtue of adaptability. By eschewing certainty in favour of probability and by reasoning upon facts rather than on hypothetical speculation (so Gladstone assumed), change could be cautious, but more importantly, factual and solidly inferential in logic. Since in Butler's sermon on Human Ignorance 'he showed that all knowledge served to raise a curiosity which it could not satisfy'. The pretensions of a professional coterie of intellectuals failed to grasp that every extension of our knowledge was really an extension of our ignorance.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, Butler

Powerfully tends to create in his reader, a certain habit of mind which is usually far from common, and which at the present day, and amidst the present tendencies, both of the average and even of the more active mind, may justly be termed rare. The politician, the lawyer, the scientist, the theologian, are all of them, apart from any

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<sup>112</sup> Mss Acland d.68. f 66. Gladstone to H. W. Acland 29 October 1883. Also quoted in *The Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 11, July 1883 - December 1886, p. 51. Acland had sent Gladstone his speech on October 24. This is located at GP Add Mss 44091 f. 137 ff, 'Groundwork of Culture. An Address'.

<sup>113</sup> GP Add Mss 44093, f. 291. Gladstone to Acton, copy, 26 June 1887.

<sup>114</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 105



strong controlling action due to individual character, marked by a certain habit of mind incidental to the profession or pursuit. Butler's pursuit, and the labours of those who study him, are incessantly conversant with the relation between the lower and the higher world, between all shapes of human character and experience on one side and a great governing agency on the other. Such a pursuit will not fail to build up its own habit of mind; and it does not coincide with the habit of mind belonging to any of the professions, as such, that have been mentioned. He does not write like a person addicted to any profession or pursuit; his mind is essentially free. He is the votary of truth, and is bound to no other allegiance.<sup>115</sup>

The success of Gladstone's apologetic would depend upon how well he could apply this method in the various aspects of faith and theology he chose or was obliged to engage in. The remainder of this study will show that the results of such an application were uneven. It is possible to view Gladstone's public engagement with the nature of scientific explanation, evolution and the Mosaic cosmogony, for example, as imprudent. This is because the application was less successful and less precise where he was unable to utilise specific, detailed and up to date information as shown above in his battle with Huxley over the Gadarene swine. Whereas when he applied the same method with greater exactitude, on topics such as inspiration and the idea of the future life, he met with greater success. In all these areas the same apologetic could appear more or less conservative or more or less practical dependent upon its flexibility.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

## CHAPTER FOUR. FUTURE LIFE AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

### Introduction.

An especially useful way of investigating how Gladstone applied his theoretical conclusions is to examine his reaction to the late-Victorian debate over future life and punishment. Firstly, it enables the historian to view Gladstone's dialectical process in action and acknowledge the extent of development in his later religious views. Secondly, because the subject has not received the detailed attention it merits. There is scope, then, for a detailed analysis to re-evaluate Gladstone's apologetics which, on this topic, are often seen as being of little consequence to his personality as a whole.

In October 1882 when Gladstone had just endured a protracted series of 'crises' over Ireland and was ruminating upon his long cherished desire to retire from politics, he wrote the following letter to a private correspondent:

Madam,

Although I have no knowledge of your letter, or of its writer, except the few lines that it contains, I cannot refuse to deviate from my ordinary practice by answering the solemn question it proposes in very few words to the best of my ability.

I do not think that with our present faculties, and with the limited information given to us by Holy Scripture and by Church History, we can form any distinct opinion of "the future condition of lost souls".

I should say, if you ask my advice, let us build upon the two articles of belief, first that sin leads to misery and secondly that God is perfectly just and merciful.

It is easy to believe that you have "broken God's laws" as we have all done, but difficult to allow that you have "shut yourself out from all forgiveness" for this has happened to none who have, as you seem to have, a care and a thought to be forgiven.

He who is so vast as to be unapproachable has come nearer to us in the person of His son, through whose Humanity it is asserted that we shall obtain reunion with the source and centre of our being. If you will to test this, read in the Psalms and 'a Kempis's Imitation of Christ.

I remain madam

Your most obedient servant



(Signed) W.E. Gladstone.<sup>1</sup>

This summarises all the important themes that Gladstone would refer to in his writings and notes on the future life: the centrality of sin and its consequences; the need to be forgiven and the means of this by the *sine qua non* of Christ's atonement; the solemn nature of eternal punishment and the present incapacity of the human mind to solve it. However, there is also the reliance, for Gladstone, upon history and scripture. Most importantly, there is the need for total dependence upon God's revealed, providential plan for mankind and the reserve and acceptance this should entail in the true believer.

Historians have generally ignored or quietly bypassed Gladstone's views on future life and punishment as of little intrinsic interest. This is a great mistake as the surviving evidence shows that this topic absorbed a great deal of his intellectual energy and reveals that, in this area, his religious thought underwent some significant development which sheds new light on his personality as a whole. It is no longer acceptable to blithely state as Lathbury did that "theologically what he was in 1845 he was to the end"<sup>2</sup>. Detailed modern studies that have dealt with this subject at all in general tend to reinforce this stereotype.<sup>3</sup>

Before discussing Gladstone's views in detail, it is important to ask why the question of future life and punishment was so important to him. There are repeated instances of Gladstone himself answering this question in his surviving writings and

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<sup>1</sup> GP Add Mss 44477, ff. 93-94, Gladstone to Mrs. Mansel, 14 October 1882. This letter is a copy in Gladstone's hand. The original letter from Mrs. Mansel is not located in the remaining Gladstone Papers, nor is there any further information on the identity of Mrs. Mansel.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Lathbury, *Mr Gladstone*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> P. Butler, *Gladstone, Church, State and Tractarianism*; P. J. Jagger, Gladstone. *The Making of a Christian Politician*. The drawback of these is whilst they do not deny theological and intellectual development took place in Gladstone's mind, their concentration on his earlier life leaves unanswered and unconsidered the extent or nature of any further development after 1850. Of modern historians, only David Bebbington (*William Ewart Gladstone*, p.235) has appreciated a notable shift. At the publication of Gladstone's magnum opus on Bishop Butler in 1896, there are plenty of contemporary reports as to the extent to which his views had developed vis-à-vis the future life. For these views see St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Glynne-Gladstone Papers volume 1644 which contains press cuttings of the Butler studies. See especially the reviews of Rev. J. Robinson Gregory in the *Methodist Recorder*, n.d. (July 1896?); the *St. James' Gazette*, 24 July 1896; the *Spectator*, 12 September 1896 and the *Westminster Gazette*, 23 January 1896. See also G. W. E. Russell, *Mr Gladstone's Religious Development*, p. 55 and W. A. Burch, 'Mr Gladstone and Conditional Immortality', *Good News*, (Worcester, Mass., USA, No. 113, 23 March 1898) testifying to Gladstone's theological development in his last years in the area of future life.



correspondence.<sup>4</sup> It is effectively encapsulated in a letter he wrote to his daughter on 31 December 1872

The welfare of my fellow creatures is more than ever at stake, but not within the walls of Parliament. The battle is to be fought in the region of thought, and the issue is belief or disbelief in the unseen world, and its guardian, the Creator, Lord and deliverer of mankind.<sup>5</sup>

The early to mid-1870s seems to have been a decisive period in Gladstone's later religious thought. In these years, he turned to engaging issues such as science and the future life in a more detailed and systematic manner than before. The results of his efforts, not always made public (as in this present topic), all seem to be related to combating unbelief. In 1875, Gladstone set out a programme of intellectual activity that, as Matthew states, was partly to satisfy his wife but was also a personal manifesto.

Also I endeavoured to lay out before C. my views about the future & remaining section of my life. In the outline they are undefined but in substance definite. The main point is this: that, setting aside exceptional circumstances which would have to provide for themselves, my prospective work is not parliamentary. My tie will be

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to Gladstone's published writings which can be found in *Gleanings of Past Years*, 8 Volumes, (London, 1879 and 1898); *SSB*, Part Two, Chapters 1-5, pp. 141-267. The latter appeared in part of the *North American Review* in 1896, which was reprinted, for sale in the United Kingdom, as *On the Condition of Man in a Future Life*, (London, 1896). See the two memoranda on the future life by Gladstone, GP Add Mss 44753, ff. 157-82, dated 13 November 1864 but written over a period of months before and GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 361-497, datable to July - August 1876 from diary and internal evidence. Among the many letters in which Gladstone discusses the reasons behind the importance of the topic of the future life, see the following in D. C. Lathbury, *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, Vol. II, Gladstone to Bishop Tait of London 26 April 1864, p. 83; Gladstone to Lord Blachford, c.1876, pp. 103-104; Gladstone to G. W. Potter 22 October 1878, pp. 105-107; Gladstone to the Hon. Mrs. W H. Gladstone, 12 July 1896, pp. 120-121. See also Gladstone to Stephen Edward Gladstone 26 May 1868, p. 179, 15 September 1868, p. 186 and 3 February 1896, pp. 123-124. In the GP see Gladstone to Blachford, August 1876, Add Mss 44107, f. 352 ff; Gladstone to George Potter, 22 October 1878, Add Mss 44458, ff. 83-87, copy; Gladstone to B.M. Malabai, 14 July 1889, Add Mss 44507, ff. 69-78 copy; and Gladstone to Rev. R. C. Jenkins, 26 August 1895, Add Mss 44521, ff. 30-31, copy.

<sup>5</sup> P. Magnus, *Gladstone: A Biography*, p. 219. See also Gladstone to Mrs Gladstone, 6 April 1874: "There is one thing I should like you to understand clearly as to my very view of things, for it is an essential part of that view. I am convinced that the welfare of mankind does not now depend on the State or the world of politics: the real battle is being fought in the world of thought; where a deadly attack is made with great tenacity of purpose and over a wide field upon the greatest treasure of mankind, the belief in God, and the Gospel of Christ". Quoted in A. Tilney-Bassett (ed.), *Gladstone to His Wife*, (London, 1936), pp. 201-202.



slight to an Assembly with whose tendencies I am little in harmony at the present time: nor can I flatter myself with what is called the public, out of doors, is more sympathetic. But there is much to be done with the pen, all having such a high & sacred end, for even Homeric study as I view of it [sic] is in this very sense of high importance: and what lies beyond this is concerned directly with the great subject of belief. By Good or evil on these matters the destinies of mankind are at this time infinitely more important than the work of any man in Parliament. God has in some measure opened this path to me.<sup>6</sup>

The unseen world loomed large in this agenda. Within the same year Gladstone was in contact with the freethinker Thomas Scott and the Duke of Argyll on the merits and rationality of prayer. In a memorandum sent to both Scott and Argyll, Gladstone revealed what, to him, was the crux of the matter in dealing with the issues relating to God, evil and the unseen world.

To lay a philosophical basis for prayer I must show it to be reasonable, useful: I am not bound to show it to be the only thing reasonable or useful, or even to point out all its reasons and uses. Nor do I undertake, in exhibiting adequate grounds of prayer, to cover [?] *obiter* all the difficult problems of our state and destiny. I think it best to exhibit a narrow front; and will not now touch the origin of Evil.<sup>7</sup>

In the unseen world, the arena in which the debate over future life and punishment was concerned, much, indeed, was unthinkable. "But this is only saying that God is greater, and greatly greater, than we are. 'His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts'". Gladstone utilised the Butlerian argument that the unseen world is not capable of full comprehension; therefore, by analogy, we cannot fully understand daily experience either. It is in this frame of mind that a year later Gladstone wrote out a very lengthy, unpublished, memorandum on the future life.<sup>8</sup>

Gladstone saw himself as a defender and apologist on this issue. This is clearly spelled out in a lengthy, unpublished memorandum of 1876 in which he writes

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Gladstone Diaries*, Vol. 9 January 1875 - December 1880,, p. xxvii. Entry for 30 March 1875.

<sup>7</sup> GP Add Mss 44762, f. 255, 15 December 1875. Replies to Propositions on Prayer. See also diary for the same date, Vol. 9 *loc cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> GP Add Mss 44762, f. 254, 9 December 1875. Propositions on Prayer. See also diary entry for the same date, Vol. 9, *loc cit.*, p. 87.

The war against Christianity is now waged noisily all along the line but most of all perhaps at that point along the line where it presents the doctrine of future and of eternal punishment.<sup>9</sup>

The historian is given another reason for Gladstone's preoccupation with the subject of the future life, when writing in 1896 he was alarmed at the decline of belief in the punishment of the wicked after death, even amongst Christians. Twenty years earlier and reflecting upon a breakfast conversation with Tennyson, Gladstone remarked on his deficiencies of thought upon future punishment and theology in general. He said about Tennyson, "...he has not thought, I conceive, systematically or thoroughly upon them, but is much alarmed at the prospect of loss of belief".<sup>10</sup> It was this unsystematic, almost diffuse, speculation on a subject of divine truth which "even if secondary is so needful" that alarmed Gladstone. He wrote "not for the satisfaction of speculative curiosity" but in the hope that

the feeblest effort in a right direction will not be wholly frustrate, but may, at least in some few minds, operate as a warning.<sup>11</sup>

It was also part of Gladstone's wider criticism of what Shannon has described as his anathema against the mental rashness and futile speculation that he believed infected the minds of his contemporaries from the 1860s onwards.<sup>12</sup> It was the

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<sup>9</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, f. 370. Memorandum on Future Retribution, 1876.

<sup>10</sup> Gladstone Diary, vol. 9, *loc cit.*, 2/11/1876. See also H. Page, *Tennyson: an Illustrated Life*, (London, 1992), p. 149 where Mary Gladstone recorded Tennyson's discussion with Gladstone on "eternal punishment (In which T. firmly disbelieves), the immortality of the soul and prayer". Other diary references where Gladstone noted either discussion or correspondence on future life includes 24/3/1864, 27/2/1864, 2/4/1864 with the Argyll's, 23/7/1864 with the Roman Catholic Mr Kenaway, 13/11/1864, 14/12/1865 with Philip Henry, fifth Earl of Stanhope, 14/11/1875 with Sir George Prevost, 6/8/1876, 10-21/8/1876, 23-31/8/1876, 8/5/1878 with the Rev. S. E. Gladstone, 12/5/1878, 26/1/1882 with Mrs. S. Rendel. Amongst those to whom reference is made to discussing this topic, not referenced in the diary are S. Laing MP, e.g. GP Add Mss 44504, ff. 189-191, copy 1 August 1888, ff. 24-29, 9 September 1888; Lionel Tollemache e.g. GP Add Mss 44513, ff. 304-305, 17 December 1896, 44525, ff. 45-48, 15 January 1897; G.W.E. Russell, the Rev. H. N. Oxenham, e.g. GP Add Mss 44433, ff. 301-305, 14 March 1872 and the Rev. Wentworth Webster e.g. GP Add Mss 45522, f. 45, 30 January 1896. Many other examples could be given.

<sup>11</sup> Gladstone, *SSB* p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> R. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898*, p.116. W. Tuckwell, 'Mr Gladstone as Critic', p. 142.



premature avidity for system and the dangers not just to faith but also to science and morality against “the precipitatory and intellectual tyranny of speculation”. It was glaringly obvious in relation to the unseen world that “the limits of our real knowledge [outside of divine revelation] are (if I may use the word) infinitely narrow”.<sup>13</sup>

### Theoretical Considerations and Problems with Source Materials.

It is therefore very important to begin this discussion with Gladstone’s detailed thoughts upon the sources used in arguing for a future life and the terms of debate they would justify. Gladstone took for granted the idea of a future state, specifically the Christian after life, and the concomitant belief in God as creator and providential ruler of the universe. As W. Tuckwell commented, Gladstone commenced his apologetics fortified with an antecedent presumption in favour of dogmatic statements, in addition to the evidence offered for their defence.

Nevertheless, as several writers have noticed, from the 1870s, (as exemplified by the symposia on the ‘soul and future life’ in the journal *Nineteenth Century*), public discussions on immortality and an afterlife were increasingly based upon secular presuppositions. These were the result of the influence of attacks upon Christian orthodoxy by scientists and agnostics amongst the educated elite in Britain - precisely the circle Gladstone moved in.<sup>14</sup> Christians amongst the intelligentsia still publicly prepared to argue for the future life, both theologically and philosophically, no longer wished to emphasise the doctrine of eternal punishment and never even mentioned the idea of Hell.<sup>15</sup> Hence, even before Gladstone began to consider the problem he was handicapped in that he could never seriously understand, let alone empathise, with an intellectual alternative to Christianity. In the eighteenth century - so beloved by Gladstone in the area of future life - David Hume had already established that Christianity could not be taken for granted, especially if this was based upon analogy and inductivism. However, these concepts were a large part of Gladstone’s apologetic.

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<sup>13</sup> GP Add Mss 44423, f. 229, copy, Gladstone to Stanley Jevons, 10 May 1874.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians. A Study of Nineteenth Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life*, (Oxford, 1974), p. 4 and pp. 133-38; P. Jalland, *Death and the Victorian Family*, (Oxford, 1996), pp. 267-68 and pp. 353-60 and A. W. Brown, *The Metaphysical Society*, p.3 and pp. 190-91.

<sup>15</sup> Contribution to the symposia on ‘The Soul and Future Life’, *Nineteenth Century*, Volume 1, No. 8, (October 1877), pp. 497-99 by Lord Selborne and pp. 517-21 by Dr. W. G. Ward.



In other words, Gladstone failed convincingly to answer the question in his copy of W.R. Alger's *A History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*- that is "how does anyone know that the mind of Jesus dialectically grasped the metaphysical notion of eternity?"<sup>16</sup> Other than using Scripture, the early Church Fathers' interpretation of this and Bishop Butler's use of analogy (none of which were remotely radical for a late-Victorian) Gladstone really did not engage with the contemporary philosophical arguments for or against the existence of a future life. Certainly, and unlike Alger, he nowhere engages in the history of this philosophical debate.<sup>17</sup>

In part, this is because Gladstone proceeds to deal only with the specific problems of a Christian philosophy as his 1876 memoranda and his studies on Bishop Butler demonstrate. Gladstone's aims were simply to examine theories (mainly Christian) relating to the natural immortality of the soul, the nature or even existence of a "final doom" for sinners and whether "either or both of these (are) taught as doctrines of the Catholic Faith?"<sup>18</sup> Although this marked a shift from his earlier attempts to analyse the doctrine of eternal punishment in relation to the divine attributes and whether or not this was a legitimate undertaking for a Christian, it still located him solely in a debate between theists.<sup>19</sup> Effectively this meant ignoring, for example, materialist arguments against a future life since he rejected materialism on Christian rather than purely philosophical grounds, as we have seen above in Chapter Two.

This could have left Gladstone dangerously exposed, something he does not appear to have fully comprehended, particularly in his reliance on the methods of Butler. This is demonstrated in Gladstone's analysis of Chapter One of Butler's *Analogy*

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<sup>16</sup> W. R. Alger, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future life. With a Complete Bibliography on the Subject*, (Philadelphia, 1864), p.527. There is a mark of approbation 'V' in his copy of Randles (see below) on Alger's quote. Alger's work was repeatedly referred to by Gladstone. For example, see *SSB*, p. 182 and *GGP*, 1454, fragments listing books read by him in which Alger's book frequently crops up. Unfortunately, these fragments are undated, but his diary records the reading of Alger on 5/8/1871 and 7/7/1878. It was obviously reread in his last years for use in *SSB*. Together with C. A. Row's book, (*Future Retribution. Viewed in the Light of Reason and Revelation*, London, 1887), it is one of the few specifically named books on future punishment he mentions. Indeed the Gladstone Papers contain the only book review on future punishment, which is Row's book, *GP Add Mss 44773*, ff. 61-64. Gladstone also recommended this book to the Duke of Argyll to begin his studies on modern Christian eschatology, *GP Add Mss 44106*, f. 285, copy, Argyll to Gladstone, 28 December 1894.

<sup>17</sup> Alger, *Critical History*, Part fifth, Historical and critical dissertations concerning a future life, pp. 450-662. William Rounseville Alger (1822-1905). American Unitarian theologian. Widely published in the field of practical or pastoral theology. See *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, edited by James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, (New York, 1887-1889. Newly edited by Stanley L. Kos, 1999, 2001). <http://www.famousamericans.net/williamrounsevillealger>.

<sup>18</sup> *GP Add Mss 44698*, f. 369. 1876 memo.

<sup>19</sup> For his earlier views, see *GP Add Mss 44753*, ff. 157-182, 1864 memo.



on the future life. He accepted the force of Butler's argument, which argued from reason, and the analogy of nature for the logical possibility, if not even the inherent probability, of some form of future life or existence after death.<sup>20</sup> Gladstone mainly used Butler with reference to the debate on the natural immortality of the soul, but it should be noted that he accepted both the plausibility of Butler's positive arguments for future life and the more convincing negative arguments against the assumption that it is illogical to argue for life after death. He emphatically accepts Butler's inductivist metaphysics. Indeed, this is the main appeal of Butler for him rather than any detailed argument he has to offer in favour of future existence. Writing to William Thomas McCormick, vicar of St. Matthew's Brighton in 1894, Gladstone argued

I lean to the belief that the comprehensive arguments of Bishop Butler are in no way tied down to the propositions he seeks to prove, and supply a master key to our obligations in respect to the problems associated with our relations to the Almighty.<sup>21</sup>

However, it was here that learned contemporaries pointed out that Gladstone was most vulnerable. Lord Acton and Sir Thomas Dyke Acland both told Gladstone that Immanuel Kant and German metaphysics had largely superseded Butler.<sup>22</sup> Gladstone in replying to Acton remained unapologetic in his reliance on and defence of Butler. He told Acland

I want to know when did time produce a greater-perhaps so great-a teacher on the laws of moral action as between God and man?<sup>23</sup>

Gladstone's Christian view of man was strengthened by Butler's Platonically influenced metaphysics, and was congenial given the statesman's admiration for ancient Greek culture. Both Plato and Christianity shared an optimistic and progressive view of man's development because humanity had the intellectual capacity (for Gladstone given by God at creation) to understand reality and unlock the intelligibility of the

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<sup>20</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 141-47.

<sup>21</sup> GP Add Mss 44519, f. 9, copy, Gladstone to McCormick, 12 August 1894.

<sup>22</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, f. 208, Acton to Gladstone, 23 September 1892 and GP Add Mss 44092, f. 413, Acland to Gladstone, 17 June 1896.

<sup>23</sup> GP Add Mss 44459, f. 15, Gladstone to Acland, 26 September 1892.

universe. This was in contradistinction to Kant's more sceptical views of reality that is unknowable itself and in this life will remain unknowable for man.<sup>24</sup> Here is a case where Gladstone's idealist compatible hierarchy of knowledge, as outlined in Chapter Two, was inimical to German metaphysics due to his idealism being more rooted in ancient Greek thought than contemporary (neo-) Hegelianism. Gladstone wrote to Archbishop Manning in 1873 that "German Philosophy [i.e. Hegelianism and by inference its English Idealist interpreters at Oxford] has added but little to the stock of our knowledge of the mind and nature of man, if indeed it has added anything".<sup>25</sup>

The point is that Gladstone relies heavily on the use of analogy for his contention that a future life exists independent of the witness of revelation. Yet, these arguments carried less weight by the late-Victorian period precisely as Acton pointed out to Gladstone because there were dangers in resting propositions on the authorities of previous times.<sup>26</sup> For Butler wrote as an apologist of the early eighteenth century against the Deists of his time. By the 1890s, when Gladstone finally published his considered views on Butler's method, the force of Butler's views in regard to future life, rather than religion in general, could be considered somewhat passé and of little intellectual significance, since both the philosophical and theological assumptions of Butler and the Deists had been superseded with the rise of modern biological and psychological sciences.<sup>27</sup> Whether it devalued the *overall* merit of Gladstone's argument is a matter of debate, given the renewed interest in Butler in specifically *religious* thought in the 1890s.

Concerning the eternal punishment of the irredeemably wicked Gladstone made some trenchant remarks on the role of human reason in trying to understand and justify the ways of God to man. Commenting on Matthew chapter 27, verse 29 "He wasn't like the teachers of the law; instead he taught with authority", Gladstone argued that when Christ spoke plainly of eternal punishment and the utter destruction of sinners one should not object because this is at variance with any preconceived ideas of God. Instead, one should accept the words of Christ as in effect saying

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<sup>24</sup> See T. A. Roberts, 'Butler and Immortality' in C. Cunliffe, (ed.), *Joseph Butler's Moral and Political Thought*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>25</sup> GP Add Mss 44250, f. 93, Gladstone to Manning, 16 February 1873

<sup>26</sup> J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, Popular edition, Vol. 2, pp. 450-51.

<sup>27</sup> J. Garnett, 'Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain' in Cunliffe (ed.), *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought*, pp. 74-75.



By things which you could understand I have every title to be believed; believe me even though you do not understand me.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the gospel of Christ is to be believed on trust and the Apostolic Church's teaching on eternal punishment is built upon this trust. It is from this that we can learn to discover the truth of God, in contrast to the spontaneous promptings of our hearts and minds often seen as self-evidently natural and therefore in accord with God's desire.<sup>29</sup> However, this is not all, because the teachings of Christ are not the whim of some individual mind - they are the eternal and universal laws of right. Gladstone vehemently objected to modern speculation and its rejection of Christ's teaching on the finality of eternal punishment, because this was the product of an essentially subjective mind destructive of all continuity, brotherhood and community in Christian religion that was vital to the defence of the revealed truths of God.<sup>30</sup> This would be a devaluation of the incarnation and its importance to Gladstone, as pointed out in Chapter One.

This was a point of cardinal importance. It built upon Gladstone's use of St. Augustine and the Vincentian canon. In March 1872, Gladstone had mused in private respecting the canon:

It is the community as distinguished from classes, the body as distinguished from the parts. It is not an appeal to mere numbers. Neither is it an appeal to individual authorities. The collective sense is different from numerical preponderance: it is sometimes called moral unanimity. So it is also different from an array of individual authorities. We deal not so much with authorities who make a role as with witnesses who tell us what it is. They do not rule the body but speak for it. It has many organs, and these (?) are the organs which we call the wise.<sup>31</sup>

At the close of his 1876 memorandum on future retribution, Gladstone makes the general point that when in either the Church, or a part of it, or even in the individual, there begins a movement to question a widely held belief, it is essential to see the nature of the belief in relation to faith as a whole. Thought, which is not faith

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<sup>28</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, f. 181. 1864 memo.

<sup>29</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, f. 178. 1864 memo.

<sup>30</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, f. 182. 1864 memo.

<sup>31</sup> GP Add Mss 44760, f. 176. Memorandum, 12 March 1872. See diary entry for that date, Vol. 8 July 1871 - December 1874, p. 125.

destroying, need not be set aside simply because it is contrary to long and widely held tradition. Reasoning must be subject to the most rigorous examination of conscience. Where ratiocination is least safe is when the result generated is untested by any worthy or complete examination by a competent theological authority. At this point, the memorandum ends without completion.<sup>32</sup>

However, it seems probable that Gladstone was contending that some of the ideas then objected to about future punishment had never had an ecumenical binding authority. Instead, they consisted of a large importation of speculative metaphysics into the arena of religious truth. Therefore, when the critics objected to what they perceived as Christian views on future punishment that may well have held a long place in the Church as erroneous, but not as faith destroying opinions, they were, in fact, objecting to corrupted or false ideas which were never part of the original Apostolic teaching. Nor did they ever claim or were granted the authority of *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*. To sum up: the problem with the modern critics of Christian theology, thought Gladstone, was that they failed to distinguish between sources that were admissible and those that were not in contested areas. Therefore, they proceeded to magnify their error in mistaking this for the truth.

Hence, Gladstone could lambast because of this,

(s)ome of those who contend for the doctrine of unending punishment appear gratuitously to forgo a portion of the sources available in support of their argument.<sup>33</sup>

This cardinal point was developed in a critical essay on Marshall Randles' book *For Ever. An Essay in Eternal Punishment*.<sup>34</sup> This is the kind of book that ought to have appealed to Gladstone as it wished to emphasise the awfulness and reality of the "terrors of the Lord" and to assert that once God had revealed eternal punishment as

<sup>32</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 487-90. Memorandum on Future Retribution, 1876.

<sup>33</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, f. 373. 1876 memo. His detailed critique is on ff. 378-82. See also his annotated marginalia in his copy of Randles, Third edition, (London, 1878), held at St. Deiniol's library, Hawarden. He heavily annotated Chapter Two, dealing with 'Sources of Knowledge' with repeated marks of reservation and disapprobation 'ma' and 'XX' together with notices 'I' and 'II NB', pp. 10-23.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Marshall Randles (1826-1904). Wesleyan Orthodox Minister. In 1886, he succeeded William Burt Pope as tutor of systematic theology at Didsbury College. Received Degree of DD from Wesleyan Theological College, Montreal. A strong advocate of total abstinence and conservative theology, he eventually acknowledged the usefulness of higher criticism. *For Ever* was his best known work, reaching four editions by 1895. Oxford DNB, 2004-05. Article by C. H. Irwin and Rev. Martin Wellings. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article.35669>.



part of His truth, human reason could not presume to judge against His providential scheme of government. That, in fact, one should only inquire into this subject with the greatest solemnity.

The importance of Gladstone's critique for his views on future life and punishment, indeed for his religious views in general, lies not so much in his discussion of the details of Randles' work as for his criticism respecting the presuppositions upon which it rested.

Randles argued that Holy Scripture might be reasoned upon so as to deduce unrevealed knowledge from revealed.<sup>35</sup> It is here that Gladstone objected as he said this contradicted Randles' previous assertion on the inadmissibility of reason and effectively submits Biblical teaching on eternal punishment to individual interpretation. Gladstone pointed out that Randles argued that reason can judge an 'apparent' doctrine of scripture as only 'apparent' and therefore reject it when the individual (and unaided) reasoning process determines that scripture is either

- (i) Contradictory in itself;
- (ii) Contradictory to any clearly ascertained teaching of revelation in another place;
- (iii) Is at variance with the context of scripture;
- (iv) And when it contradicts a truth clearly established by natural reason as the arbiter of truth.

Gladstone argued that when Randles appealed to the clear meaning of scripture he actually admitted that "what saith the Scripture" is dependent upon individual interpretation. Further, that this view is aggravated when Randles subjects the veracity of Catholic doctrine to the individual conscience or pre-conceived and ultimately culturally determined views of right and wrong that are as variable as the number of people. Although Gladstone agreed with Randles that conscience is often defective in the individual, he argued, unsurprisingly, that in contrast the collective conscience of the whole of mankind or the Church is of very great weight indeed.

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<sup>35</sup> This is also a point made by another author he used in *SSB*, Dr. Thomas Burnett's *De Statu Mortuorum et Resurgentiam (Of the State of the Blessed Dead and those that are to Rise)*, London, Second edition, 1728. Gladstone wrote, "I cannot but look upon the treatise as a noteworthy fact in the history of declared opinions in this difficult subject", i.e. eternal punishment. He possessed a second edition and an unauthorised English translation of 1728, now kept at St. Deiniol's library. See D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell. Seventeenth Century Discussions of Eternal Torments*, (Chicago, 1964), pp. 159-60; P. C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 147-55.



This was no mechanical or pre-rational tradition that was appealed to but the total and unified experience of human and/or Christian life through a long series of ages. Contrary views, like plus and minus, tended to eliminate each other. Hence, Gladstone argued for a single organic Christian conscience over and above the individual mind, in an echo of his early *State in its Relations with the Church*. So whilst Randles was correct to argue against those who said a doctrine of endless punishment violated their conscience, he forgoes the much weightier evidence of a collective Christian conscience which has been accepted by Christendom, for example, in the form of the Apostolic and Nicene creeds and the five ecumenical Church councils. In effect, a powerful tool in the defence of orthodoxy is ignored by Randles, in favour of individual reason despite his supposed reliance upon scripture alone.

In sum, Gladstone argued that it was just as important to defend the real sources of our knowledge on the subject of eternal punishment, as it is to defend the doctrine itself.<sup>36</sup> Of course, this did not preclude the fact that one could debate what the doctrine defended actually consisted of, as long as one refrained from substituting individual opinion as *de fide* dogmatic truth, which was a perversion of the use of God-given reason.

Therefore, Gladstone reiterated, some of the extreme views and ideas about future punishment objected to by his contemporaries had never, in fact, received ecumenical or binding authority. He could accept the force of the critics of the doctrine such as F. W. Farrar and F. N. Oxenham that as popularly presented it consisted of a large influx of speculative metaphysics into the arena of religious truth.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>36</sup> See also GP Add Mss 44504, f. 251, copy, Gladstone to S. Laing, 9 September 1888 where Gladstone writes "...I do not want consciously to forfeit the claims of being a fair minded man...I ask myself two things *in limine*. First, How I am enabled to know, that a creature like man is well qualified to judge the degree (or kind) of evidence, which ought to accompany a revelation. Secondly, from whatever source this claim is to be made good, I do not think it is from the experience of life and the rules recognised as those of common sense in calculating it". In f. 382 he goes on to quote Tennyson that ultimate knowledge of God this side of the grave is always 'beyond the veil' Gladstone made a similar point to the ex-Anglican, now theist, Charles Vosey on the distinction between the Butlerian method and the defective nature and competence of man's mind in judgement of revelation and the quest for perfect scientific knowledge. See GP Add Mss 44450, ff. 228-29, copy, Gladstone to Vosey, 2 July 1876.

<sup>37</sup> F. W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope. Five Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey, November and December 1877*, (London, 1879), especially sermons III 'Hell, what it is not', pp. 49-59 and IV 'Are there few that be saved?' pp. 90-117. Gladstone's edition is heavily annotated, mostly negatively, except for approbationary marks on the distortion of traditional teaching, e.g. 'V' on p. 57 and 62 on Jeremy Taylor, Fr. Furniss and Dwight Moody and a squiggly line on p. 93 on the utterly false picture of God presented. See also F. N. Oxenham, *Everlasting Punishment. Is the Popular*



(as reflected in Gladstone's 1876 memorandum), these supposed 'Christian' views even though they may well have held a long place in the Church as erroneous, but not faith destroying opinions, could be rejected as corrupt or false ideas. They were never part of the original apostolic deposit of faith, nor had dogmatic theologians ever claimed them to possess binding authority.<sup>38</sup> The problem was that many modern Christian and non-Christian critics of modern eschatology mistook erroneous opinions for true faith, and, like Andrew Jukes, could use the same fallacious reasons as Randles to interpret scripture as allowing and teaching the notion of Universal salvation that could be a stimulus to unbelief.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, conservative defenders of eternal punishment, such as E. B. Pusey and H. N. Oxenham, could accept such reasoning demonstrating that it was hardly in advance of mainstream Christian opinions.<sup>40</sup>

Whether one sees this as reflective of Gladstone's use of Butlerian reserve or Aristotelian approximation in the quest for truth, it applied equally to Gladstone's views on the terminology with which the debate on future life often rested. In contrast to many other thinkers on this subject, he was not disposed to the 'cut and paste' use of key-terms of scripture to elucidate an argument or win a point of debate.<sup>41</sup> Such terms included 'finite', 'infinite', 'eternal', 'death', 'punishment' and 'pain'.

A memorandum of 1864 gives some of his most sustained reasoning on the use of terminology in the argument over eternal punishment. Bebbington is correct to point out the link between this and an 1861 memorandum. This latter memo is the earliest mature view on the future life found in the Gladstone papers. As with most of his writings on this subject the ideas on eternal punishment are embedded within a discussion of the existence of evil and pain in the world. The problem is that at this

*Doctrine de fide? And, if not, is it true? Considered in a Letter to the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, M.P.*, (London, 1875).

<sup>38</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 478-80. 1876 memo.

<sup>39</sup> Gladstone's annotations to Jukes' book, also criticises him on the same ground as Randles in arguing, "what saith the scripture?" On pages 95 and 101, he has written 'ma'. *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things. With Some Preliminary Remarks on the Nature and Interpretation of Holy Scripture. A Letter to a Friend*, Sixth edition, (London, 1877).

<sup>40</sup> E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment? In Reply to Dr Farrar's Challenge in his 'Eternal Hope'*, Third edition, (London, 1880), pp. 1-2, "I do fear that the disbelief in it, to which a great impulse has been given by the writings of late years, must be to the great peril of souls" since in attacking abuses, critics throw out the baby with the bathwater. H. N. Oxenham, *Catholic Eschatology and Universalism. An Essay on the Doctrine of Future Retribution*, Second, revised and enlarged edition, (London, 1878), pp. xii-iii, and pp. xxv-xxviii.

<sup>41</sup> Something that was a late-Victorian bugbear, and bedevilled the controversies over Farrar's *Eternal Hope* and arguments for conditional immortality. See Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 139-52 and M. Wheeler, *Death and Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*, (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 178-79.

time Gladstone viewed with caution the view that “throughout all eternity the wicked will exist and will continue in their wickedness”. How one could reconcile the divine attributes was recognised as a major problem bound up with the origin and purpose of evil. While in 1861 Gladstone refrained from suggesting a solution to this impasse in an example of Butlerian reserve, the problem of eternal punishment in his mind was, from the beginning, largely a result of his need to get to grips with its terminology.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, by 1864 when he came to write a lengthy disquisition on the meanings of eternity, infinity and punishment, Gladstone remonstrated that either one abandons belief in an all-just, all-powerful and all-holy God or one does believe in a God of this kind and simply trusts Him. Inappropriate speculation is ultimately unprofitable.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, misgoverned, ill advised and ill-thought out speculations respecting the key-terms, which underlay the debate over eternal punishment, were irregular, unscientific and, sometimes irreverent, solutions to the problem of evil, which formed the crux of the argument on punishment.<sup>44</sup>

This was also part of a wider argument repeatedly used by Gladstone on the limits of human language to express divine truth. Commenting on the denial of everlasting punishment by one of the contributors to the *Essays and Reviews* collection Gladstone wrote to Archibald Campbell Tait, then Bishop of London:

I do not believe it is in the power of human language to bind the understanding and conscience of man with any theological obligations, which mode of argument used and the principles assumed would not effectually unloose.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, writing to Canon Edward Hawkins, provost of Oriel College, Oxford in 1873 he commented,

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<sup>42</sup> GP Add Mss 44736, ff. 208-11. No date, but follows a memo written on the same type of paper dated to 26 September 1861.

<sup>43</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, ff. 181-82. 1864 memo.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 174.

<sup>45</sup> Gladstone to Tait, 26 April 1864, Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 83. See also GGP 1454 and undated fragment on the value of language. Gladstone comments: “The great value of language in studying the human mind, arises out of the fact that it is the most natural record of its tendencies - not the best. The structure of language seems abandoned to accident - which would render it a dishonest record”.



It is not really by ideas as such, but by conduct in its largest sense and including all of our powers, that I presume we shall be judged. Further I think the one main source of difficulty in the matter arises from the importing the popular sense of terms such as 'saved' into theology, and another from assumptions in the region of philosophy that we know more about eternity than we really do.<sup>46</sup>

Specifically it was "unwarrantable daring" to argue on the terminology involved in eternal punishment as "is this not carrying authentic and quantitative laws further into the unseen world than is philosophically just?"<sup>47</sup> Indeed where has the exact definition of eternity or anything respecting the nature of the unseen world been revealed?

Of the illegitimate mixture of metaphysics with religion we have a significant instance in the adoption by the Lateran council of the phrase 'transubstantiation' to express the Real presence.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, Gladstone persuaded himself to rest easy and not be overly troubled on the problems of definition. "I find most of what I see on the question [eternal punishment] defective even in its first condition- the definition of terms used".<sup>49</sup>

### Is the Soul Naturally Immortal?

Turning to the question of the natural immortality of the soul one can begin to trace the development of Gladstone's mind in an area of theology to which he devoted considerable attention in his later years. Indeed, he read more on the immortality of the soul than he did on arguments for or against eternal punishment or Universal Salvation.<sup>50</sup> Given this, it is so striking that his 1864 memorandum on future retribution hardly mentions the soul. However even here there are clues as to the eventual direction his mind would take, towards a modified form of conditional immortality. In other words, there is the germ of an idea that differentiated his concept of eternal punishment from the traditional Tractarian ideas exemplified in the thought of E. B. Pusey which held as an *a priori* the natural immortality of the soul. Gladstone wrote

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<sup>46</sup> Gladstone to Hawkins, 27 July 1873, Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p.91. On the damnatory clauses of the Athanasian Creed.

<sup>47</sup> GP Add Mss, 44107, f. 352.

<sup>48</sup> GP Add Mss 44458, ff. 84-85, copy, Gladstone to George Potter, 22 October 1878.

<sup>49</sup> Gladstone to Thomas Scott, 16 November 1873, Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> For example, Gladstone never read one of the key texts of Universalism, Samuel Cox, *Salvator Mundi: or is Christ the Saviour of all Men?* (London, 1877).

We do not really know...whether the soul will always remain dark and unsatisfied by its lusts and cravings intensified by the full knowledge of what God is and would have been to him. Lastly we do not know whether such punishment is self-consuming so that in the end it destroys itself leaving only a void in the universe of God<sup>51</sup>

Following an examination of Gladstone's marginalia and writings on the soul, (published and unpublished) it is possible to show how his mind developed intellectually on this issue. His absorption of knowledge over the course of his last thirty years showed no sudden conversion from his earlier positions but a gradual inclusiveness and incorporation of ideas. This was no uncritical or straightforward acceptance but an increasing willingness to admit the validity or cogency of some ideas such as conditional immortality. This does not mean that he rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment but he was willing to allow to Christians new areas valid for a reasoned speculation consistent with a refusal to act as a judge of God's prerogatives. There was a general solvent effect upon his mind, although it remains highly contentious whether this will support the view that he became more liberal in the sense of the term meaning anti-dogmatic. Yet, the following argument hopes to demonstrate that he certainly became more tolerant and less hidebound on questions regarding the soul and future punishment.

From the mass of available evidence, two themes are chosen. First, an analysis of Gladstone's arguments for the lack of scriptural and Patristic evidence for an undisputed, categorical view of the natural immortality of the soul. Second, there will be a discussion of his analysis of Bishop Butler's ideas on the survival of the soul after death.

Gladstone is quite forthright:

Is it not a fact, and if it is so is it not a very staggering fact, that the natural immortality of the soul is nowhere in the New Testament either stated or assumed? There is no statement in the New Testament which either contains it or requires it in order to stand as true.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, ff. 170-71. 1864 memo.

<sup>52</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, f. 450. 1876 memo, Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 198 and p.256, and MacColl, 'Mr. Gladstone as a Theologian' in Reid (ed.), *Gladstone*, pp. 269-70.



In the 1870s, he told Malcolm MacColl, “the theory of the natural immortality of the soul has no place among the credenda of the Church”. MacColl later emphasized that on this subject Gladstone’s aim was simply “an endeavour to strip it of its acquired character as a doctrine of religion, and to exhibit it as a contested and undecided matter of philosophical speculation upon which we do not possess material sufficient to warrant the assertion of any religious duty to either affirm or deny”.<sup>53</sup> After dismissing those scriptural passages which came nearest to this, that is Matthew chapter 10, verse 28 and Luke chapter 12, verse 4, Gladstone goes on to make what to him is the crucial distinction that these only require the believer to embrace the survival of the souls of the righteous in certain given circumstances.

However, the survival of the soul is not *pari passu* natural and inherent immortality. On the contrary, and he provides a list, there are plenty of assurances in the New Testament that the hope of a future life is always taught in connection with the redemption and as the gift of Christ.<sup>54</sup> This is intimately linked to his continuing belief that the atonement of Christ was one of penal satisfaction, a moral redemption, and a relief from ethical as well as forensic evil.

Some historians hold that a conservative evangelical theology continued to strongly influence Gladstone in his later life. This view implies that the newer Anglican and nonconformist incarnationalist theologies had little impact upon the mind of Gladstone.<sup>55</sup> However, as Chapter One on the incarnation argued against Hilton, for example, the extent of remaining evangelical influence is still open to debate, despite admitting that it still had some emotional appeal for the later Gladstone.

It is important to emphasize that Gladstone never publicly and dogmatically asserted a denial of the natural immortality of the soul, only its overwhelming theological and philosophical improbability. It is clear that personally he was disinclined to believe it. Writing to his daughter-in-law Gertrude, he commented

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>54</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, f. 451 and ff. 452-56. 1876 memo; 1 Cor. 15; Mark 12:18-27, Matt 22:23-33 and Luke 20:27-40, parable of the seven husbands. Luke 16:19-31, parable of Dives and Lazarus, ff. 453-56.

<sup>55</sup> Gladstone, ‘True and False Conceptions of the Atonement’. Reprinted from the ‘Nineteenth Century’ in *Later Gleanings*, pp. 312-37, especially pp. 332-35 on the vicarious atonement of Christ being not only a pardon for sin but also a moral renovation of the essence of man. For the newer views, see J. Gardner, *Aspects of Christian Social Thought in England from c.1890 to 1914*, MA dissertation, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, (1997).

There are those who say sin is a disease, and a mortal disease, when it has taken final possession of a being, destroys that being and when our Saviour says "whose worm dieth not" these would hold the meaning to be the worm in these unhappy creatures, being inseparably annexed to the life, eat it out, destroy it, and is only itself destroyed in it. I do not rely on this: the subject is too far beyond me. I am not able altogether to put this plea aside.<sup>56</sup>

Further, in replying to a letter from his clergyman son, Stephen, Gladstone was quick to point out that,

I am profoundly struck on finding that Butler declines to commit himself to 'natural immortality' or avoids it. Next I find it is nowhere in Scripture or the Creeds, and I am not inclined to allow it to be an article of religion. I suppose it to be a philosophical opinion which gradually, from about the time of St. Augustine, found its way into the popular tradition: but this has never been affirmed by the Church at large.<sup>57</sup>

The Gospels were not a philosophy to set out and account for the nature of the universe, nor a textbook to answer the vagaries of human speculation. The good news was to be separate from the pagan and popular wisdom of its times and its immediate focus was strictly limited to the *practical* object of saving man from his own sin, gradually and through the willing acceptance of God's free grace in the act of Christ's atonement. This is the reason why there is very little description of an afterlife in the New Testament. Its writers were uninterested in questions of abstract philosophical dogma.<sup>58</sup>

Gladstone argued that the Greek doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul had infiltrated the Christian Church in the fourth century, due to the spread of Christianity and the obvious lack of an immediate Parousia. This had required consideration of the soul's future existence not just in connection with the saved but also with the wicked. Gladstone struggled, at this point, to resolve a tension in one of his Patristic theological mentors, St. Augustine.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> GGP 986, unfolioed letters, copy, Gladstone to Getrude Gladstone, 10 July 1892.

<sup>57</sup> Gladstone to S. E. Gladstone, 3 February 1896, Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 123. The original letter to Gladstone is in GGP 673, 30 January 1896. See also Gladstone's notes in the draft manuscript index to Butler's works, GGP 1465. In the entry for immortality - that is natural immortality of the soul-he wrote "an hypothesis", to make sure the reader would know that Butler was not committed to the idea, but considered it.

<sup>58</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 458-60 and f. 464. 1876 memo.

<sup>59</sup> See SSB, pp. 179-80, also GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 414-19, 'How the changes came about' and ff. 469-78, 'Natural immortality in the light of tradition: the early tradition', 1876 memo.



He attempted to use Augustine's interpretation of Genesis chapter 1, verse 26, to argue that there was no evidence to demonstrate this passage implied the natural immortality of the soul. Using Augustine's *De Genesi ad Litteram* and *De Civitate Dei*, Gladstone argued that nothing is immortal except the spiritual body that is promised only to the redeemed at the resurrection. Nevertheless, this argument supported, despite Gladstone's reservations (and was used by conditionalists such as Edward White to suppose)<sup>60</sup>, the eventual annihilation or extinction of the wicked after a due period of retributory punishment. However, Gladstone had to acknowledge that elsewhere Augustine explicitly taught the immortality of the soul in *De Immortalitate Animae*. He was forced to contend that in another work *De Animae Quantitate* Augustine had not valued what metaphysical thought there had been on this subject and that since Augustine's views on immortality were philosophical rather than theological they were nowhere declared by an ecumenical authority to bind even the Western Church.<sup>61</sup>

This illustrates two points. Firstly, it confirms Matthew's opinion that Gladstone was not at his best on abstract or speculative questions, as his instinct was always for the practical and didactic aspects of a topic.<sup>62</sup> Secondly, it shows that Gladstone's views on non-dogmatising and trust in God was well in keeping with the

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<sup>60</sup> Edward White was the most significant thinker on conditional immortality in the mid-Victorian period. He wrote extensively on the subject and acted as a mentor for many others. He produced the major works of this school, upon which later authors developed, such as *What is the Fall?* in 1844, *Life in Christ* in 1845 and *The Theology of Missions* in 1855. *Life in Christ* is described by Rowell as "the most important publication of conditionalism" which was rewritten in 1875. In 1878, a revised and expanded version of this second edition was produced, (Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 188-200). Gladstone's heavily annotated edition in St. Deiniol's library is the 1875 version, *Life in Christ. A Study of the Scripture Doctrine Concerning the Nature of Man, the Object of the Divine Incarnation and the Conditions of Human Immortality*, (London, 1875). On St. Augustine's view of Genesis Chapter 1, and White's interpretation, it is interesting to note that Gladstone has written on the title page to the chapter in which it occurs "somewhat overstated". His annotations are frequently those of 'ma' indicating his reservations. See Chapter 4, 'The Orthodox Doctrine on the Nature and Destiny of Man', especially pp. 53-57 and later on pp. 95-131 where White used Genesis to argue explicitly for conditional immortality as the Biblical doctrine of man-again this is heavily annotated with reservations. Given that the diary evidence shows Gladstone to have read White over a number of days in August 1876, (begun on the 6 th. and finished on the 23 rd.), and given that by this time he had personally all but rejected natural immortality, it is significant that his critical comments on White show that he also rejected conditional immortality. Nevertheless, his reading during August 1876 was heavily slanted towards authors favourable to this position, e.g. H. Constable, *Hades, or the Intermediate State of Man*, (London, 1873); the influential report of the 1876 conditional immortality conference (heavily marked), and R. W. Dale's translation of the Swiss theological disciple of White, Emmanuel Petaval (-Olliffe), *The Struggle for Eternal Life or the Immortality of the Just and the Gradual Extinction of the Wicked*, (London, 1875), also heavily scored.

<sup>61</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 163-65.

<sup>62</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809-1898*, p. 261.



history of Christian thought on the subject of the soul's existence and future. Perhaps there is reflected here an imprint of earlier broad-church type characteristics seen in his review of *Ecce Homo*. This is the emphasis on the moral efforts of religion instead of a scrupulous devotion to arcane dogma. This was due to an inherent tension in Christian eschatology between a strand of belief derived from Palestinian Judaism that stressed the resurrection of the body as a social apocalyptic event and another strain of the thought in Diaspora Hellenised Judaism that incorporated Greek ideas on an individual concept of the immortality of the soul.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising that a tension existed in his review of Patristic writings.

In fact, it required a shrewd and sophisticated mind to recognise the antinomy and, as shown, to avoid a simplistic and reductionist reliance on the literal terminology of the Bible to decide one way or another. Unlike Lord Blachford who wrote that he agreed with Gladstone that natural immortality is not a truth of religion or philosophy, the latter realised the error of asserting that this idea "is of little argumentative consequence".<sup>64</sup>

It is in his use of the scriptural evidence against natural immortality, nonetheless, that Gladstone was at once both profound and at times surprisingly naïve given nineteenth-century developments in Biblical criticism. This is an argument explored at greater length in Chapter Five below. One of his most original and penetrating analyses is his discussion of the raising of Lazarus as told in John 11: 21-24. Here the figure of Martha becomes "everyman/woman" in her trust and love in Christ when dealing with the fate of her brother's soul. The Apostles too are praised for never spontaneously or gratuitously asking Christ for detailed explanations of the fate of the soul. This reaches a climax when Gladstone comments on another parable:

The greatest depth revealed to us at this time is the mind of the blind mother, who kept all these things and pondered them in her heart, not because she understood, but in order that she might understand.<sup>65</sup>

Conversely, Gladstone could at times adopt an extremely unsophisticated literalism. For example, he merely cites the parable of the seven husbands to argue that the body as it is now is not naturally immortal for it cannot marry nor be married in a future state.

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<sup>63</sup> Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 19-20; Wheeler, *Death and Future Life*, pp. 2-3 and Anthony Flew in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Volume 4, (New York, 1967), 'Immortality', pp. 139-40.

<sup>64</sup> GP Add Mss 44107, f. 355, Blachford to Gladstone, 23 August 1876.

<sup>65</sup> GP Add Mss 4468, f. 462. See also ff. 461-64, 1876 memo.



Likewise, he also cites the parable of Dives and Lazarus taking for granted that it reflects a physical reality. To him this shows that there is no declaration of natural immortality, for Dives' suffering is antecedent to the day of judgement.<sup>66</sup>

It is in his analysis of the Old Testament, arguing against a scriptural belief in immortality, however, that a trend of conservative Biblical criticism in Gladstone's thought is best observed. That is, it was conservative in comparison to mainstream criticism in late-Victorian Britain and even more in regard to British interpreters of the latest German criticism on the psalms such as Thomas Kelly Cheyne, Canon of Rochester, Oriel Professor of Interpretation of Holy Scripture and Bampton lecturer for 1889.<sup>67</sup> Even so, this shows that Gladstone accepted Biblical criticism within his overall apologetic (see Chapter Five below).<sup>68</sup>

In 1891, Gladstone published *On the Ancient Beliefs in a Future State* in response to an article on the Old Testament and Immortality by Cheyne.<sup>69</sup> Gladstone wished to deny that one could extrapolate a doctrine of immortality from Psalms 16, 17, 36, 44, 63 and 73. In order to do so he had to argue that Zoroastrianism did not influence the theology of the Psalms. To maintain this, Gladstone had to establish that the Psalms were of early origin, (i.e. before the Persian rule of Judea). Gladstone, moreover, put forward that Cheyne sustained his argument based on an *a priori* claim. This was that the original idea of a future life was early in human history, but that knowledge and understanding of it increased with time.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, ff. 455-57.

<sup>67</sup> Even amongst the younger generation of Anglo-Catholics who wrote the study *Lux Mundi* in 1889, Biblical criticism had become an accepted tool of scholarship. This work was produced in the same year as Thomas Kelly Cheyne's Bampton lectures, *The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter in the Light of Old Testament Criticism and the History of Religions*, (London, 1891). Significantly, Gladstone never records reading this work in his diary. Indeed, Cheyne, in his reply to Gladstone points out that he seems to be unfamiliar with these lectures and had relied upon a popular presentation of his views in the *Indian Church Quarterly Review*. In fact, he wrote to Gladstone complaining of this unfair treatment and the way the public, due to Gladstone's reputation, would draw misinformed conclusions from his works. GP Add Mss 44513, ff. 282-83, Cheyne to Gladstone, 30 November 1891.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Kelly Cheyne (1841-1915). Biblical scholar. Oxford educated, but also spent time at the University of Göttingen under the Old Testament critic Heinrich Ewald. Held various academic posts at Oxford where, from 1885 to 1908, he was Oriel Professor of Interpretation of Holy Scripture and Canon of Rochester. A pioneer of the introduction of German historical and textual criticism to England. From the 1890s, this became more radical, extreme, and less sensitive towards the nuances of traditional English criticism. Oxford DNB, Joanna Hawke, 2004-05, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32395>

<sup>69</sup> 'The Historical Origin of the Biblical Doctrine of Immortality', *Indian Church Quarterly Review*, No. 11, (April 1891), 127-38.

<sup>70</sup> Gladstone, 'On The Ancient Beliefs in a Future State', (1891). Reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century in Later Gleanings*, 352-83.



Cheyne's reply points out Gladstone's critical naivety on several counts. Gladstone had sought to counter the assertion that the Psalms led to immortality by denying their late origin and accepting that the majority were of Davidic authorship.<sup>71</sup> Cheyne pointed out that this "runs counter to the prevailing tendency of modern thought" and that on critical and philological grounds the Psalms do make plausible the case that the Jews only possessed the hope of immortality towards the end of the Old Testament period. Most significantly, he notes that Gladstone did not use first hand or critically any original ancient authorities except Homer and Herodotus and was dependent upon an English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, a critical drawback.<sup>72</sup>

The chief point of weakness for Gladstone, however, was in his use of Homer. Gladstone insisted that ancient or primitive religion was in some sense dogmatic and that it contained divine truth given in a universal primeval revelation, traces of which are to be found in the earliest scriptures and in a more or less corrupt state in pagan religions such as those described by Homer.<sup>73</sup> Cheyne was correct in pointing out that Gladstone had not consulted the most modern or advanced authorities in comparative religion as they would reject his theories on a retrograde development from a primitive revelation which were based on his long cherished theses on Homer. Further, that this was essentially a pre-critical theological theory that sought to account for parallelisms between the various religions in order to deny the Old Testament hope of immortality. This was rejected by, for example, the Oxford anthropologist Max Müller. In addition, if Gladstone conceded a large Hellenic intellectual influence upon the Christian revelation, why could he not conceive of at least a modest Persian influence on Hebrew religion, which stimulated the native germinal hope of immortality?<sup>74</sup>

The other major source used by Gladstone on the immortality of the soul was the first chapter of part one of Butler's *Analogy* and various other excerpts scattered

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 361. See also *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. Revised and Enlarged from 'Good Words'*, (London, 1890), p. 41 and p. 134.

<sup>72</sup> T. K. Cheyne, 'Ancient Beliefs in Immortality. A Reply to Mr. Gladstone', *Nineteenth Century*, (December 1891), 951-68, especially p. 951 and pp. 958-60. This also applied to Gladstone's Biblical studies in his *Impregnable Rock*, p. 3 and p. 66 (see Cheyne p. 957). Further, see 'Rejoinder on Authority in Matters of Opinion', reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century* in *Gleanings of Past Years*, Volume 3, 173-215, especially p. 177 and 'The Lord's Day' from *Later Gleanings*, p. 374.

<sup>73</sup> See D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and Homer', pp. 57-74 for a fuller exposition on this theme in D. W. Bebbington, and R. Swift, (eds.) *Gladstone Centenary Essays*. See also Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>74</sup> Cheyne, *Ancient Beliefs*, pp. 959-60 and p. 962.



throughout parts one and two of this work.<sup>75</sup> In his use of Butler, Gladstone was a critical scholar and at times an acute commentator on the validity of Butler's arguments for the late-nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Although Gladstone's views have been criticised as irrelevant by the 1890s (due to his desire to defend Butler from mid-Victorian critics such as Matthew Arnold), his studies on Butler and immortality were less polemical than his defence of Butler's method and are thus less open to this particular criticism.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike some of his material on probability and miracles, this was largely the fruit of research conducted in the late 1880s and early 1890s even though it builds upon and expands his arguments from the mid-1870s. Gladstone is less defensive of Butler and much more active in engaging with the contemporary debate. Even so, there are some unresolved tensions in his argument.

Perhaps the most important point Gladstone wished to validate was that Butler, in the first chapter of the *Analogy*, did not commit himself to the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul.<sup>78</sup> Butler's view is that death does not presume the extinction of the body-soul unit but, rather, by analogy from the nature of our present life, seems to point to its continued existence or survival (in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary). The survival of the body-soul unit according to Butler was a hope, credibility and likelihood. It was not the metaphysical principle of the soul's essential immortality, widely advocated in the philosophy and theology of Butler's day and re-emphasised by the Seventeenth Century Cambridge Platonists.<sup>79</sup>

Given this, there is evidence that even Gladstone realised that the logical difference between survival and immortality is specious. Any detailed examination of

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<sup>75</sup> Chapter and section numbers refer to Gladstone's edition, *WJB, II, Analogy*, Introduction, section 17. Part One: Chapter 1; Chapter two, sections 1, 11, 12, 13, 16, 16n(ote); chapter 3, sections 26, 28; Chapters 4 and 5; and Chapter 8, sections 4, 5, 7. Part Two: Chapter 1, sections 9, 24; Chapter 5, sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 11n(ote), 22; Chapter 6, sections 10, 11, 23; and Chapter 8, sections 22, 26.

<sup>76</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 149-50. On the argument of continuance based upon existence. Gladstone said that Butler's argument of purpose in life is valid, but suggests Butler's evidence does not support him. Butler only argued for an 'end' in life which if not completed in earthly existence, argues the likelihood of a future existence to fulfil this end is strong. Gladstone argued that Butler was wrong to state that people exist in part to fulfil ends. He should have substituted purpose for 'end'. For people may reach their created ends in this life, but not their divine purpose.

<sup>77</sup> Garnett, Cunliffe (ed.), *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>78</sup> In addition to his letter to S. E. Gladstone see *SSB*, pp. 152-54 and his edition of the *Analogy*, the footnote on pp.19-20 where Butler is stated to have reserved his opinion because the natural immortality of the soul is not derived from the "constitutional course of nature", that is, the divine creation.

<sup>79</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 153. GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 375-76. 1876 memo.



the first chapter will show that there is no logical reason why Butler's arguments *a posteriori* will not admit of the natural immortality of the soul.<sup>80</sup> As if to forestall critics and cover himself, Gladstone is quick to point out that perhaps Butler himself believed the doctrine privately or perhaps he did not wish to fly in the face of a view nearly universal in his day and for a long time before. Gladstone, in fact, could only continue to stress Butler's reserve, commenting

For this reserve, as for all the notable inflections of his thought, he must, without doubt, have had grave reasons. If Butler really held himself back from the full adoption of the popular and established opinion, such an abstention, presents to us an instance both of circumspection, and of mental courage founded on solid originality, which may be said to form a landmark in the history of opinion.<sup>81</sup>

Given this, and Gladstone's ingrained belief in reverent trust in God, Butler had a great appeal for Gladstone.

There is one significant aspect of Gladstone's study on the soul and future life, which revealed a lacuna in his Christian armour partly derived from his philosophical interest in the soul via Butler and the Clarke-Dodwell controversy of the early Eighteenth Century.<sup>82</sup> It concerns science: the connection between the mind and brain, and soul and whether the essence of life is fundamentally material or spiritual. The problem was that Butler, unsurprisingly, closely connected his comments on the future life with his views on personal identity. The Duke of Argyll advised Gladstone in 1895 that Butler had a vague, almost premonitory, grasp of the idea of creation by gradated

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<sup>80</sup> Gladstone, *WJB, II, Analogy*, pp. 19-20. Gladstone comments that Butler did not argue for or against natural immortality, not that his arguments could not be used against it.

<sup>81</sup> Gladstone *SSB*, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> In an editorial comment to the diary entry for 13/8/1876, Matthew (Vol. 9, *loc cit.*, p.147) stated that the 1876 memorandum was "the skeleton of a book, never published (but used in *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler* [1896]), deriving in part from the Clarke-Dodwell controversy of 1706". This is the only comment Matthew makes on either the memorandum or immortality. The controversy between Samuel Clarke and Henry Dodwell triggered a whole debate that ran from 1706-08. Dodwell had denied the natural immortality of the soul by arguing from God's creation of Adam. He presumed Adam to have the tripartite nature of body and soul created mortal, but given the Divine spirit that carried immortality. Man was capable of immortality through God's grace which original sin had removed. It is an argument remarkably similar to and foreshadowing Edward White. Both stressed that only by virtue of Christ's atonement, and faith in it, could a person be restored to *fitness* for an afterlife. Gladstone read Dodwell, Clarke and other participants in the debate in August 1876 and quoted from them in his memorandum. His library possessed seventeen original volumes on this subject. On the Clarke-Dodwell controversy, see J. P. Ferguson, *Dr. Samuel Clarke. An Eighteenth Century Heretic*, (Kineton, 1976) pp. 36-40; and his *The Philosophy of Dr. Samuel Clarke and its Critics*, (New York, 1974), pp. 138-43. Also Almond, *Heaven and Hell*, pp. 61-65.



and successive stages instead of one special creation-in other words, evolution - (which given his contemporary intellectual context was the more remarkable). Nevertheless, knowledge of the mind-brain relation had increased significantly since then and most especially during Gladstone's lifetime.<sup>83</sup> At the same time Gladstone's old Oxford friend, Sir Thomas Dyke Acland reminded him that Butler's enduring value was primarily ethical, not metaphysical. As stated above, Kant had superseded him.<sup>84</sup>

The essence of the matter is that Gladstone sought to use Butler to argue for the survival of the body-soul unit. This meant accepting Butler's idea that the human being was 'indiscerptible' (i.e. single and indivisible) as well as being compound. In other words, man is not both a body and soul but is a body-soul monad.<sup>85</sup> Both of these propositions were highly debatable by the late Nineteenth Century, particularly to those influenced by Kant, Hegel and German Idealism, so belittled by Gladstone. What is the significance? Essentially that if Gladstone based part of his argument on Butler's ontology, then his thesis would be weakened when certain of Butler's propositions could be criticised as untenable. Again, this reveals that Gladstone's apologetic operated on several layers of intensity and success.

In fairness to Gladstone, he was aware of this and sought to respond to sympathetic critics of Butler such as the Rev. Alexander Richard Eagar who subjected the *Analogy* to contemporary scientific thought. Writing to Eagar, he made the prescient point that

We do not, I apprehend, at present know where the dividing line between flesh or matter and spirit is, so the ground is too slippery for assertions.<sup>86</sup>

In contradistinction to the claims of science, he went on to argue

If it be replied that we cannot think without concomitant molecular action of the brain, I suppose he [Butler] might contend in answer that there is some presumption of burden: but no appearance of help.

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<sup>83</sup> GP Add Mss 44106, f. 310, Argyll to Gladstone, 2 November 1895. Also J. Oppenheim, *The Other World. Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 265-67.

<sup>84</sup> GP Add Mss 44092, f. 412, Acland to Gladstone, undated but probably March/April 1895.

<sup>85</sup> Gladstone, *WJB, II, Analogy*, Part One, Chapter 1, sections 11-20, pp. 29-35; SSB, pp. 142-50 and GP Add Mss 44698, f. 375. 1876 memo.

<sup>86</sup> GP Add Mss 44423, f. 125, copy, Gladstone to Alexander Richard Eagar, 13 July 1896.

Our souls may be harnessed, so to speak, to our bodies; 'the corruptible body presseth down the soul'. To assert absolutely that the soul cannot act without the body, is one thing; but to deny the contradictory can be asserted is another.<sup>87</sup>

In the footnotes to his edition of the *Analogy*, Gladstone, in section 23 of Chapter One, noted that Butler is careful to distinguish between thought and other 'living powers'. Thought does not depend upon the physical body in the same way, for example, as our sense of sight (and the perceptions derived therefrom), depends upon the organs of the body.<sup>88</sup> In fact, Gladstone can turn the tables on his opponent. He used Eagar's theories on the existence and development of multicellular organisms to support Butler's contention: that living beings are 'indiscernible'.<sup>89</sup>

In his preface, Eagar stated he wrote "to help in a just appreciation of Bishop Butler's work, and to supply such additional matter as will enable that work to be of more use in connection with the present position of theological thought".<sup>90</sup> In Chapter Four, 'On Life, Death and Immortality', Gladstone noted Eagar's contention: that is, going beyond the facts to assert that bodily decay means diminution in all human activities.<sup>91</sup> Gladstone made a further mark of 'NB' where Eagar used the ideas of the biologist August Weismann to the effect that death is not, strictly speaking, a universal law of nature. In multicellular animals, there is division between the original germ cell and constantly replaced somatic cells. The transmission of germ cells from parent to child is consistent with individual existence. This is because an individual's 'germ life' remains unimpaired, so that the essence of the self in some post-mortem form may well survive the death of our presently organised bodies.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, Eagar's own ideas on somatic or germ cells as irreplaceable and indestructible can be criticised. Nevertheless, this shows Gladstone's remarkably febrile mind. Philosophically what was to replace the Cartesian solution to the problem of mind-body dualism was still a matter of heated debate in the late-Nineteenth Century amongst scientists, philosophers and psychologists.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 124.

<sup>88</sup> Gladstone, *WJB, II, Analogy*, Part One, Chapter One, section 4, note on pp. 22-23 and notes on pp. 38-39 and section 10.

<sup>89</sup> A. R. Eagar, *Butler's "Analogy" and Modern Thought*, (London, 1893), Chapter 4, 'Life, death and immortality', especially pp. 110-14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107. Gladstone has marked 'I'.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-15.

<sup>93</sup> Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 266.



As a final comment on this subject, it is interesting that Gladstone nowhere seems to have used Darwinian ideas on evolution to support his disinclination towards the natural immortality of the soul. Since there is evidence that he had little difficulty in reconciling evolution and Christian revelation (see Chapter Five), the reason might be that the ideas of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace could lead to a denial of the soul and an afterlife itself.<sup>94</sup> This view is more plausible if we remember that Gladstone assumed belief in an afterlife as fundamental on divinely revealed grounds, rather than using the propositions and arguments of philosophy.

### Eternal Punishment.

Gladstone thought and wrote enormously on the question of eternal punishment, especially on the vexed problem of the final destiny of those people who were impenetrably and irredeemably wicked. This was the starting point in 1861, as commented above, for his first note on the subject. The thread of his argument from a wide variety of sources is extremely complicated and the following is merely an analysis of its most salient and crucial aspects. It is very tempting to simply summarise what he wrote in his *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*, as Lathbury argued this encapsulated the essence of his views that would otherwise be impossible given their scattered pattern throughout his writings and correspondence.<sup>95</sup> Even so, these other writings do contain very significant points and help to demonstrate how he developed his mature and considered opinions.

Geoffrey Rowell stated at the beginning of his pioneering work on Victorian attitudes to Hell and eternal punishment that “of all the articles of accepted Christian orthodoxy that troubled the consciences of Victorian Churchmen, none caused more anxiety than the everlasting punishment of the wicked”. This was as much an attack or phenomena from within Christian theology as from without. He then goes to illustrate the extent of the changes of opinion by quoting Gladstone from *Studies Subsidiary* of the alarm he expressed in 1896 that the doctrine was no longer preached, “relegated to the far-off corners of the Christian mind, and there to sleep in a deep shadow, as a thing needless in our enlightened and progressive age”.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone. Heroic Minister*, pp. 116-17 and pp. 285-86.

<sup>95</sup> Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 219.

<sup>96</sup> Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, p. 3. The quote is from Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 206.

In order to put Gladstone's comments into context it is necessary to show what the consensus was that appeared to have vanished in the second half of Queen Victoria's reign. Although it is not fully descriptive and is inevitably generalised, one of the best outlines of the orthodox Christian consensus on eternal punishment, valid during the first half of the nineteenth century, was given in an article (critically annotated by Gladstone) by the anonymous *Presbyter Anglicanus* (actually James Hemmington Harris, an Anglican priest). It essentially stated the following: that the condition of man was irrevocably fixed at the instant of death, and that due to the fall of Adam the natural outcome, without exception, was one of eternal torments. However, the death of Christ had redeemed man, but this gave salvation only for those who believed in the Gospel and were baptised into the Church or had been converted. Every believer had to die in a state of penitence and any unrepented sin before death consigned the believer to eternal punishment in the flames of Hell. Moreover, moralists, sceptics, philosophers, heathens, ignorant children all automatically endured this penalty because of the sin of Adam. Natural good, shades of character or degrees of guilt were inadmissible in this divine dispensation of justice.<sup>97</sup>

Already objected to on philosophical and theological grounds as a human distortion of the Gospel, it was now condemned in terms of its didactics. Citing C. A. Row and W. R. Alger, Gladstone acknowledged that the doctrine of eternal punishment was often preached presumptuously and arrogantly and that

perhaps it may have been loaded with extravagant extensions and with details sometimes unwarranted, sometimes even approaching to the loathsome.<sup>98</sup>

Or there could be occasions when

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<sup>97</sup> *Presbyter Anglicanus* (James Hemmington Harris), *Eternal Punishment. An Examination of the Doctrines Held by the Clergy of the Church of England on the Subject of Future Retribution. With an Appendix*, (London, 1864), pp. 6-7. Gladstone has written 'IV' to approve that this is the generally held Christian view, not that he agrees with it.

<sup>98</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 88 and see the earlier references to the annotations of F. N. Oxenham. Charles Adolphus Row (1816-1896). Anglican Theologian and apologist. Author of the widely used 1877 Bampton lectures on the critical foundations for Christian apologetics. For a contemporary, negative, view of his standing in the conservative *Church Quarterly Review*, see Vol. XXVI, (April-July 1888), 'Future Retribution', pp. 363-87. The review speaks of Row's work as faulty, shallow, erroneous, aimless and sceptical. This is a review of Row's *Future Retribution. Viewed in the Light of Reason and Revelation*, (London, 1887)



there creeps into this kind of literature a strong element of pure vulgarity.<sup>99</sup>

Gladstone, then, sought a reasoned scriptural defence of the doctrine of eternal punishment consonant with the divine attributes and ecumenical Church authority. However, he could not rest any doctrine on the natural immortality of the soul. Hence, he was denying the traditional Christian anthropological presupposition to eternal punishment, whilst seeking to defend the theological presupposition that God's punishment was both retributive and everlasting.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, as David Powys has argued in his exploration of nineteenth- and twentieth-century debates on Hell and Universal Salvation, to deny either one of these would open up the way for either annihilation or some form of post-mortem probationary development whether purification or restoration, and, to Gladstone, either were equally unacceptable.<sup>101</sup>

How did he respond? Ultimately by reserving to God the prerogative of assigning the final destiny of the wicked. Provisionally by very careful speculation and coming to a personal view that a modified form of conditional immortality was consistent with divine revelation whilst refusing to commit himself or others to be bound by it. In order to understand why, it is necessary to review his response in three key areas. Firstly, the debate over the exact meaning of divine punishment. Second a critique of the modern (i.e. Victorian) historiography of the subject. Lastly, and by far the most important to him, his reasons for rejecting universalism.

The first of these areas, that on divine punishment, tended to diminish in importance as time went by. It formed the staple of his 1864 memorandum, but from the mid-1870s was increasingly displaced, in favour of denying the now much more publicly accepted idea of universalism. To be exact, there was a shift from justifying God's right to punish per se towards defending final punishment for persistent sinners.

Indeed, in 1864 the burning question had been

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>100</sup> See GP Add Mss 44458, f. 87, copy, Gladstone to Potter, 22 October 1878, "For what I have said, you will see that I am very jealous of the great moral truths enfolded in this doctrine, but I do not see that *talis qualis*, it is enforced by the Church on her members, or even afore the (sic) clergy. And as to your second query, I hope I have also in a manner indicated such means for what I think is called the ordinary doctrine bears the mark of popular exaggeration". Also, SSB, No. 12, summary of theses on a future life, p. 261.

<sup>101</sup> D. J. Powys, 'The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism', in, N. M. S. de Cameron, (ed.) *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, (Carlisle, 1992), 93-138, especially p. 98.

Who and what is the creature that calls upon the divine being to unlock his stores and render account of his government under any heads which it pleases the interrogator to select? What is the moral standing, what is the competency, of those who require the matter to be explained to their plenary satisfaction?<sup>102</sup>

Even Christ himself only proclaimed the sanction of judgement as a gift given to him by God the Father. As for the doctrine of eternal punishment: "If there be any part of the dispensation of religion that seems beyond our province of speculation, surely it is this". Further, as to the nature of such punishment it is impossible this side of the grave to know whether it will be purely mental or physical and whether it will be the self-acting result of natural laws or inflicted upon from without

All these things, I affirm, and perhaps more, are left open to us, and perhaps others too.<sup>103</sup>

He then goes on to argue that for anyone to assert the following two statements as theological-philosophical truths is inevitably on the road to blasphemy

Acts done in time cannot be justly punished in perpetuity.  
No pain is just but that which is remedial towards the sufferers.<sup>104</sup>

The latter proposition in particular irked him, and was of long standing, as his 1847 memo on mediation, referred to in Chapter One, demonstrates. To argue that all punishment by God must be remedial is to say that God cannot punish sin as a simple vindication of His perfect moral power. To this Gladstone answers

But in the first place punishment may be effectually remedial, for all we know, without its being remedial as regards the person who suffers it.<sup>105</sup>

Thence, future punishment may be eternal and irredeemable even if it has *some* remedial force. The purpose of punishment is a moral vindication of the divine order. Both divine and human authority reveals this to be the case.

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<sup>102</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, f. 157. 1864 memo.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 161, 164 and 171. Also *SSB*, pp. 24-47.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 172.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 174-75.



Later still, he would link in arguments on punishment with his critique of universalism but he would still stress that human evil and its consequent sufferings necessitated penal justice. Reformable evil was not to be punished by penal sanctions.<sup>106</sup> By 1896, he was still arguing the same point as thirty-five years before: that beyond the fact that a just retribution exists for the wicked we cannot have any idea of it and should not speculate as to the exact quality, quantity or duration for any or everyone. Enlarging on his point made in 1864, in his concluding statements to *Studies Subsidiary*, his final answer is

if we have any reasonable grounds *aliunde* for the belief in such a being [i.e. God, the all-perfect being], is it not far better to stand upon these grounds [i.e. before the curtain of judgement] in an unbounded trust, than, by half examination of problems not referred to us, to scatter over the field an array of unanswered questions which testify to nothing but our headstrong readiness to charge ourselves with undertakings, for which we have neither commission nor capacity<sup>107</sup>

Furthermore, as has already been noted, defining the term eternity was for him not possible and ultimately unprofitable. The following quote summarises his final idea of eternity,

The declarations contained in the Scriptures of both testaments respecting the declaration of the future state, either generally or after the resurrection and the day of judgement, do not appear to go to the extreme limit of the powers of human language in describing it so as to correspond strictly with the idea of duration, or of time, prolonged continually and without end.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, despite his lengthy and active political career, Gladstone appears untouched by new or changing nineteenth century ideas of punishment in the region of criminal

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<sup>106</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 389-90 and ff. 408-409. 1876 memo.

<sup>107</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 240-47. The quote is from p. 247. It is clear from textual evidence that the above pages are a rewrite and update of his argument outlined in his 1864 memorandum, ff. 172-77. This is further evidence that he did not abandon his earlier ideas, but expanded and developed them to take on board new ideas and nuances from his prolific reading.

<sup>108</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 261, No. 10 of summary of theses on a future life. However, compare this with GP Add Mss 44698, f. 412, "we do not exactly know what is meant by eternity, but in so far as we do know it is either or includes time prolonged without an end". Although never committed to his 1876 definition, by twenty years later he had given it up. This is a rare example where he seems to have completely changed his mind concerning the future life.

penal theory. As in theology, so in the secular state he accepted the orthodox theory of punishment as primarily retributive rather than correctionary.<sup>109</sup>

In general, he was critical and unimpressed by the large contemporary historiography generated on the future life and especially the final state of the wicked. Part of the reason was the lack of a solid, detailed philosophical argument against eternal punishment amongst non-believers with which he could engage. There was the need for a negative creed or body of propositions instead of the lack of an enemy and a fictitious view of their mindset gleaned from their 'guerrilla warfare' style of debate.<sup>110</sup> He wanted a real antagonist to attack not a ghost. Writing in 1878 specifically on eternal punishment he commented

Our cause of difficulty in the matter, which seems to be a reason for much patience, is the want of what may be called standard or exhaustive works, on the negative side. At least I myself have felt this difficulty and can only get at fragmentary and therefore unsatisfactory statements.<sup>111</sup>

The veteran freethinker and campaigner Thomas Scott of Norwood even sent him a list of material to get his teeth into, commending Alger's book as the fullest and best treatment. Samuel Laing MP replied to Gladstone that his difficulty resulted from the fact that agnostic writers had no creed, because the future life as a subject was beyond human knowledge, contrary to the facts of science or held on insufficient evidence. He preferred to criticise the doctrine and let it transform itself or naturally die.<sup>112</sup>

On the other hand, Gladstone complained of the inadequate treatment of eternal punishment by Christian writers. This particularly applied to studies that examined the time of the Gospels to the era of Origen, the latter half of the Third Century.

With regard to this period, the English speaking student does not, indeed, receive all the help he might desire (so far as I know) from writers of his own tongue.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 13-14; and D. Taylor, *Policing and Punishment in England, 1750-1914*, (London, 1998), pp. 124-45.

<sup>110</sup> GP Add Mss 44504, ff. 189-91, copy, Gladstone to Laing, 17 August 1888.

<sup>111</sup> GP Add Mss 44458, ff. 83-84, copy, Gladstone to Potter, 22 October 1878.

<sup>112</sup> GP Add Mss 44434 ff. 194-95, Scott to Gladstone, 18 June 1872 and GP Add Mss 44504, f. 202, Laing to Gladstone, 22 August 1888.

<sup>113</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 182.



As any reading of his diary will show, or any perusal of the shelves at St. Deiniol's library demonstrates, he was extremely well read in this area. How could a student, a believer, hope to receive reasoned, scriptural and unbiased Patristic evidence on the subject of eternal punishment if the following authors were regarded as representative modern guides? A. D. Salmond's 1895 book although comprehensive, able and truth loving did not examine the history of Christian opinion on eschatology further than the New Testament. Alger's massive work (it had already gone to ten editions by 1878) mistakenly argued for a single Patristic scheme of eschatology as the standard of Church teaching from the First to the Tenth Centuries. For Alger this consisted of unending physical and spiritual torture, whereas Friederich Nietzsche had shown this to be false as there was great controversy as any examination of Patristic authorities shows, and as writers such as Henry Dodwell, Samuel Clarke and Emmanuel Petavel-Olliffe had identified.<sup>114</sup> It is no wonder then that the third major area of Gladstone's studies on eternal punishment involved a detailed examination of the nineteenth century debate, most especially the proponents of universalism.

After all, why was he publishing his views in defence of the moral truths of the doctrine of eternal punishment if not to

ask myself the question, what place, in the ordinary range of Christian teaching, is now found for 'the terrors of the Lord?' [Which St. Paul says] Knowing 'the terrors of the Lord', we persuade men. If [these]...had an indispensable place in the Apostolic system, it can hardly be that they ought to drop out of view in this or any other century, unless at that happy epoch when human thought and action shall present to the eye of the judge of all nothing to which terror can attach.<sup>115</sup>

Thus, what were his reasons for rejecting universalism and adopting a modified form of conditional immortality?

Primarily, or *in limine* as he put it, because universalism is unscriptural. This was so in two ways. Firstly, because it denies two unequivocally categorical declarations from the very lips of Christ, that on sin against the Holy Spirit which

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, Gladstone quotes the following: S. D. F Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, (Edinburgh, 1895); Alger, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of A Future Life*, Tenth edition, (London, 1878), pp. 395-98; F. Nietzsche, *Grundriss der Christlicher Dogmageschichte* (Berlin, 1870); H. Dodwell, *The Soul a Principle Naturally Mortal...* (1706), pp. 55, 67, 76 and 79; S. Clarke, *Fourth Defence of an Argument Made in the Use of a Letter to Mr. Dodwell*, (1708), pp. 24-27; and E. Petavel-Olliffe, *Problème de L'Immortalité*, (Paris, 1842), Volume 1, p.286.

<sup>115</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 199-200.

cannot be forgiven here or hereafter and “which clearly brings home to us that we have a real capacity for spiritual suicide”.<sup>116</sup> There is, the comment on Judas’ betrayal, that it would have been better for him not to be born. Secondly, it is based on a false interpretation of 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verses 22-28, that is, one of the key phrases used by Universalists to argue that God will eventually restore everything, dealing with evil, and be all in all. To Gladstone this is not revealed anywhere in scripture because sin (note – not punishment) will not be reduced either by a weakening of its powers or by annihilation. To argue otherwise was to ‘invent’ a new human revelation.<sup>117</sup>

As for 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 22, “in Adam all die, in Christ all shall be made alive”, Romans chapter 5 should be used as the interpretative key to show that this passage refers to initial condemnation of sin in Adam and of initial salvation through Christ and the grace of God. When dealing with final salvation, one can only share in reconciliation with God if one accepts the gift of eternal life. St. Paul was not arguing for universal restoration but against compatriots who argued that the gift of Christ was not equally and universally available. This gift is only operative if freely accepted.<sup>118</sup>

Universalism is also fatally compromised because it cannot explain away or account for the final destiny of Satan and the fallen Angels. This was an argument of some weight for Gladstone. Although these were not originally wicked, they became irreversibly so by their free act and scripture gives an account of their moral guilt and their punishment. To accept that their punishment is not eternal is to accept two propositions as true which, in fact, he has shown to be false- that finite acts cannot be punished infinitely and that all punishment is remedial. This would deny the divine revelation that evil is permanently represented in the fallen being of Satan and his minions until the reign of Christ in God’s kingdom. To contend that even these are ultimately saved is to reject the doctrine of sin and by implication the need for Christ’s atonement, the very essence of the Christian religion which Universalists claimed to believe in.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-22. Also GP Add Mss 44753, f. 169. 1864 memo.

<sup>117</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 223-24. Also GP ADD MSS 44698, ff. 395. 1876 memo.

<sup>118</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 395-97. 1876 memo.

<sup>119</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, ff. 172-74. 1864 memo; and *SSB*, p. 220 and p. 264, No. 27 of summary of theses on a future life: “The case of the Fallen Angels appears to establish a fatal flaw in the theory commonly termed Restitutionism or Universalism: whether founded on any declaration of Scripture, or as aiming at a vindication of the Divine Character by the expulsion of evil from



In annotating assent to the Rev. Thomas Allin's comment that "the number of the lost must be something in vastness defying all calculations" it seems from the context that Gladstone means the following: that the number of people who have themselves chosen wickedness and evil must on probability (note the Butlerian terminology) lead to a vast number suffering punishment and perhaps even destruction. That, further, this evidence is independent of any popular belief or creed and is therefore, like the case of the fallen Angels and Satan, a telling and unanswerable point against universal restitution or salvation.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, the theory of universalism becomes unstuck when confronted by the problem of human moral evil committed by free agents. Gladstone, unsurprisingly, admits that he cannot solve this problem but, this does not mean that there is not a solution, simply none has yet been found.<sup>121</sup> Whatever it is, it is clear that universalism cannot supply the answer to the problem of evil and in particular how and why it came into existence. In fact, the flimsy speculations and undue optimism of Universalists, as, analogously, the character Grey\* in *Robert Elsmere*, only help to undermine the sense of sin which

instead of being, as under the Christian system it ought to be, piercing and profound, is passing with very many into a shallow, feeble, and vague abstraction; and which does not hold the place in religious teaching, so far as my observation goes, to which it is entitled.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, another reason to reject Universalism is its tendency to permit, even encourage, a new form of antinomianism.

What is this but to emasculate all the sanctions of religion, and to give to wickedness, already under too feeble restraint, a new range of licence?<sup>123</sup>

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the universe; unless, indeed, there be boldness enough to include all those unhappy beings together with righteous men in the catalogue of the blest".

<sup>120</sup> T. W. Allin, *Universalism Asserted as the Hope of the Gospel on the Authority of Reason, the Fathers and Holy Scriptures*, Sixth edition, (London, 1895); p 5 is annotated 'IIV'.

<sup>121</sup> See Gladstone, 'Memorandum on Theism', 3 September 1883 in Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, pp. 406-08 and GP Add Mss 44507, ff. 71-72, copy, Gladstone to Malabai, 27 October 1889.

\* A thin disguise of T. H. Green, the Oxford idealist philosopher and moralist.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 76.

<sup>123</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 224.

Universalism bypasses any reformation of character even of the most inveterate evil person which penal punishment for sin declares to be a part of the suffering for those adjudged to merit it.<sup>124</sup> In this, he was typical of many in the nineteenth century who pronounced against Universalism because they feared it would undermine the deterrents against sin and lead to a decline and laxness in moral standards.<sup>125</sup>

Next, Universalism went against human reason and experience. This argument drew heavily from scripture and Butler's ideas on the fixity of habits as determinative of personality. "The highest and most cultivated pagan intellects teach that suffering follows wickedness as its natural and proper accompaniment. This is confirmed and recognised by philosophers like Bishop Butler who have studied life and nature in the light of Christianity"<sup>126</sup>.

The whole mass of human observation and experience shows, says Gladstone, that by the time of death each person has reached a state of moral fixedness in habits good or evil that is indefectible and indefeasible (assuming of course a respectable life span). Such finality of personal choices built up over a lifetime logically demands that the existence after death whether for bliss or eternal punishment cannot be changed by any agency existing within the providential laws of government. Therefore, it does not follow with any degree of confidence that we can say that cumulative finite acts do not produce infinite or endless consequences.<sup>127</sup> For example, in Revelation Chapter Twenty-One even scripture supports such a view. Here the unjust and filthy will remain so in a state of indestruction that due to its nature is changeless.<sup>128</sup> Scripture informs us that redemption is through Christ and that life is a probation. In the end,

In cases where evil runs this full course, it is difficult to see where lies the escape from that which our Saviour describes by the worm that

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<sup>124</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, ff. 434-36. 1876 memo.

<sup>125</sup> Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 29-30, 41, 43-44, 151-52 and 199.

<sup>126</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp.222-23. In particular, see Gladstone's notes to the *Analogy* in those sections of part one succeeding chapter 1, outlined above. These deal with the view of life as a probationary period and the nature of habits tending to reinforce each other until they become fixed and ingrained. An excellent summary of his view may be found in the following: GP Add Mss 44458, ff. 85-86, copy, Gladstone to Potter, 22 October 1878 and GGP, 986, copy, Gladstone to Gertrude Gladstone, July 10 1892. In the *WJB, II, Analogy*, see Part One, Chapter 2 excerpts; Chapter 3; Chapter 4, 'Of a state of probation, as implying trial, difficulties, and danger'; Part Two, Chapters 5 and 6 excerpts. See also *SSB*, p. 263, No. 2 in the summary of the theses on a future life; and GP Add Mss 44753, ff. 169, 172 and 177.

<sup>127</sup> GP Add Mss 44753, f. 169. 1864 memo.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 177.



dieth not, here using the figure, not of an infliction from without, but a self-growth from within.<sup>129</sup>

Finally, Universalism was condemned because it went against the reserve of the early Church on the subject of salvation. Despite the Origenistic controversy in the area of the future life, Gladstone believed the Patristic period was one of faith combined with freedom of personal moderation and reserve on all opinions extra to those proclaimed dogmatic truth. Even Origen had rebounded from publicly teaching restitution - which in any case derived more from Platonic ideas than Christ or His Apostles.<sup>130</sup> Like the doctrine of conditional immortality, Universalism lacked the authority of the Vincentian canon, *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*. In fact, there was no "moral necessity for us to be informed not only of the result of rejecting salvation, but of the entire destiny of all those who so reject it".<sup>131</sup> To Gladstone the combined effect of the Apostolic and Patristic eras was to indicate a divine purpose of reserve as to all that lies beyond "the broad and solemn" utterances of St. Paul.<sup>132</sup>

What, then, were Gladstone's views on the eternal punishment of the wicked? Moreover, why, in contrast to conservative Anglicans such as Pusey and H. P. Liddon, did Gladstone posit a modified form of conditional immortality?<sup>133</sup> Because, the farthest he was prepared to concede as legitimate for a Christian to accept in the need to know what became of the wicked after death, is this:

it follows that in those amongst departed spirits (if such there be) who have not been beneficially affected by the post-mortuary stages of their discipline, a disintegrative power of deterioration may be actively at work; that this habitual power may be then and there even more marked than here and now; and it is difficult to exclude altogether the possibility, a mere possibility without doubt, that the effect may be great losses and decays of faculty, great reduction and contraction of the scale, and the sphere, of existence.<sup>134</sup>

This differs from classic advocates of conditional immortality such as Edward White, H. N. Dobney, Henry Constable and Emmanuel Petavel-Olliffe in that it does not

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<sup>129</sup> GGP, 986, Gladstone to Gertrude Gladstone, 10 July 1892.

<sup>130</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 184-89 and pp. 195-98.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225. See also p. 179, pp. 218-20 and p. 237.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218-19. Gladstone to S. E. Gladstone, 3 February 1896. "I do not embrace or recommend the opinion of annihilation, which never, so far as I know until now has found any wide [acceptance?], cited in Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 124.

<sup>134</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 226.



include absolute extinction and is consistent with a degree of unending pain.<sup>135</sup> In essence, Gladstone was arguing that humans might become automaton-like for sin depresses, weakens and exhausts our existence. Hence, it is logical to assume that such punishment of this sin would make humanity descend into a lower level of being without losing identity or personality. The endlessness and infinitely large number of possibilities that this idea presents does not weaken the case for eternal punishment.<sup>136</sup> He disagreed with N. G. Wilkins' view that eternal punishment imputed cruelty to God by the very revealing comment that God's use of excessive pain to wear out a person (which would effectively end suffering) does not logically follow.<sup>137</sup> Writing to B. M. Malabai in response to an article on evil in Indian religious thought, Gladstone commented

The idea is attractive to me, that it may be in the nature of all moral evil to wear itself out of existence. But, even if such an idea proved to be true, it does not offer an answer to the problem, to the question how and why it came into existence.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> See reference to White and Petavel-Olliffe above. Also, H. Constable, *Hades: or the Intermediate State of Man*, (London, 1873); H. Constable, *The Duration and Nature of Future Punishment*, (London, 1876); H. N. Dobney, *A Letter to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, on that Portion of His Recent Pastoral Letter which Affirms 'the Everlasting Suffering of the Lost'*, (London, 1864). At St. Deniol's library, there are preserved another fourteen heavily annotated books and pamphlets on the subject of conditional immortality. These include some of the major non-conformist writers of the period such James Baldwin Brown, *The Doctrine of Annihilation in the Light of the Gospel of Love*, (London, 1875); S. Warleigh, *Hear the Church of England which is Proved to have Expelled from Her Articles the Dogma of Endless Torments*, (London, 1872) and William Leask, *The Scripture Doctrine of a Future Life*, (London, 1877). There is also the hugely influential *Report of the "Conditional Immortality" Conference Held at Canon Street Hotel, London, Monday, May 15, 1876*, (London, 1876). See Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp.203-204 on this. Occasionally one comes across the following interesting remark Gladstone wrote on the inside cover of *Eternal Purpose. A Study of the Scripture Doctrine Concerning Immortality*, (Philadelphia, 1881). Anonymous, but according to the card catalogue at St. Deniol's library, by William R. Hart, "This book is well meant but far from wise. It is not only too forensic and Calvinistic, but verges upon strong Manicheanism. It unites Bibliolatry with vehement opposition to the creeds, and condemnation of the Church and Churches. It is violently anti-popular. WEG. May 22.81"

<sup>136</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 227.

<sup>137</sup> N. G. Wilkins, *Errors and Terrors of Blind Guides. The Doctrine of Everlasting Pain Refuted*, (Hanover, 1875), pp. 38-44. Wilkins was the Anglican chaplain to the English-speaking residents in Hanover and had his pamphlet privately printed and distributed.

<sup>138</sup> GP Add Mss 44507, f. 72, copy, Gladstone to Malabai, 14 July 1889. Malabai had sent part of a series of articles on the problem of evil in religion in response to Samuel Laing's article in the September 1888 issue of the *Indian Spectator*. Malabai writes to ask if Gladstone agrees that his opinions are akin to those of Zoroastra. (f. 79).

It is interesting that on the subject of evil and the future life, Gladstone read one of the very few scientific works that was influential well beyond the academic profession, that is, *The Unseen Universe; or Physical Speculations on a Future State*, (London, 1875). This had been



This is why in rejecting Universalism and conditional immortality he could comment that, firstly

it is a grave matter to overset and reconstruct the faith of ages in aiming at an ideal, and then to find it remains logically unattained.<sup>139</sup>

And secondly

whether there is any safer course than to accept the declarations of Holy Scripture, which award the just doom of suffering to sin, and to leave the sin and the suffering too, where alone they can be safely left, in the hands of the Divine and unerring judge.<sup>140</sup>

Why? Because we cannot say the fate of the lost is the exact counterpart of the blest. For the latter union with God is not only a state but a law of existence - that is, the blest not only are in union with God *de facto* but have to be *de jure* in the divine scheme of setting the universe aright. There is no corresponding *de jure* dispensation given by the New Testament in relation to the lost.<sup>141</sup>

It is put forward that Gladstone's interest in, and partial attraction to, conditionalism was reflective of an Augustinian theodicy, his downplaying of a purgatory or an intermediate state and atonement based Christocentrism. Therefore, it is not surprising that he would or could empathise with an essentially conservative and Biblicist theology and eschatology, that, paradoxically, in contrast to older High Church views could appear more theologically radical or liberal especially since he had no problems in reconciling an evolutionary or progressive anthropology with his belief in

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recommended to him by the Duke of Argyll, (GP Add Mss 44103, f. 167. Argyll to Gladstone, 6 June 1875). Argyll wrote, "The anonymous book [of] which I spoke to you but of which I forgot the title at the moment, is called 'The Unseen Universe'. I am told that Professor Tait of Edinburgh and Professor Balfour Stewart, are the joint authors. It is a curious book with, I think, some valuable altho' also some rather fanciful matter. It is pleasant to have eminent physicists, nowadays on that side [of affirming the future life]".

Its basic argument was that a study of energy and transformation in the universe does not lead to the belief in the natural immortality of the soul. Less and less energy was capable of transformation so this universe will eventually dissipate into another universe in which the problems of this life will be solved via a spiritual body that has memory and action, the two essential requisites of continuous intelligent existence. For a discussion of the book's influence and value, see D. Wilson, 'A Physicist's Alternative to Materialism: The Religious Thought of George Gabriel Stokes', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, (1984), 69-96.

<sup>139</sup> GP Add Mss 44458, f. 86, copy, Gladstone to Potter, 22 October 1878.

<sup>140</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p.227.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid* p. 177.



divine creation and providential design. This also fitted in with his theological and philosophical convictions partly derived from Butler and a study of the Clarke-Dodwell controversy on the natural immortality of the soul, and a deeply held belief in sin as truly horrendous and punishment thoroughly penal and retributive. Like advocates of conditionalism, Gladstone's prerequisites sought for a mitigated Augustinianism which in no way lowered or displaced the absolute sovereignty or holiness of God as shown by his acceptance on an 'Anselmian' penal-satisfaction theory of atonement.<sup>142</sup>

Perhaps this is the reason why he struggled with the concept of an intermediate state as this would involve a degree of deferral to God's final judgement, and thus inhibit God's sovereignty, and anticipate his providential system of government. In his case and in all cases of a progressive view of the period antecedent to the last judgement some sort of punishment for the wicked or accepted purificatory pain for the blest was needed as a spiritual preparation for the deferred final states of Heaven and Hell. Hence, his interest in, but not acceptance of, the type of conditionalism that involved both provisional retribution and a second death at judgement day.<sup>143</sup>

This is probably the reason why he could agree with Farrar in his annotation of *Eternal Hope* that Butler does not use an argument that in any way tells against a

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<sup>142</sup> Gladstone, 'True and false Concepts of the Atonement', *op cit.*

<sup>143</sup> Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life*, p. 78. Gladstone's only annotated book on the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory (note, the absence of Dante in this discussion) is by St. Catherine of Sienna, read 14/12/1879. This work stressed the willing participation of the soul undergoing punishment in order to complete its joy in union with God. See Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 105 ff and pp. 163 ff.

However, Gladstone with his evangelical and later pre-tractarian High Church influences rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory as over systematised and associated with corruption such as indulgences. Yet he was still having to confront the Anglican legacy of abandoning Purgatory in the sixteenth century by denying views such as psychopannychia or sleep of the soul in the intermediate state as condemned by the Western Church as unscriptural.

This indicates his dependence as much on Ecclesiastical history as Holy Scripture for his ideas on the future life. On this, see Jagger, *Gladstone*, p. 238 and Butler, *Gladstone*, p. 201. This may account for the fact that Gladstone was attracted to the ideas of younger Anglo-Catholics, such as Herbert Mortimer Luckock, because, like many writers in this tradition, he wished to emphasize the need for purification after death without sacrificing the comfort to the bereaved that was found in much evangelical teaching (Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians*, pp. 106-07). See *After Death. An Examination of the Testimony of Primitive Times Respecting the State of the Faithful Dead and their Relationship to the Living*, (London, 1879), (read 17/12/1879 and 15/10/1888) and *The Intermediate State. Between Death and Judgement*, (London, 1890), (read 12/4/1891). GP Add Mss 44511, ff. 226-27, Luckock to Gladstone, 5 December 1890, "A few days ago I found a letter which you had written to the Bishop of Ely expressing the interest you felt in reading 'After Death' which he had sent to my wife..."



doctrine of purgatory for the blest.<sup>144</sup> Almost all that Gladstone had to say on the period after death and before final judgement is relegated to a small portion in his concluding statements on the future life in his Butler studies. He echoed Butler in agreeing that there is no new probation beyond death, but for those not already condemned there could be a completion of the present probation in which their virtue and goodness may be enhanced by more felicitous circumstances or that in some cases “the redeeming and consuming process will not be accomplished without an admixture of salutary and accepted pain”.<sup>145</sup> Since the souls of those “persons that have not during this life actually crossed the line which divides righteousness from its opposite”, survive death, then

the Christian dead are in a progressive state; and the appointed office of the interval between death and resurrection is reasonably believed to be the corroboration of every good and holy habit, and the effacement of all remains of human infirmity and vice.<sup>146</sup>

He even went as far as to argue that this augmented virtue might be an attraction and example to others who had not yet been effectually drawn to it. Thus in some way some people in an intermediate state may be capable of amendment and restoration. Yet there was a crucial qualification, namely, provided their character was capable of amendment. For the central, crucial determining of our final judgement is upon character in this world, even if there may be development in the next.<sup>147</sup> It followed that prayers for the faithful dead were simply an extension of the rational and philosophical belief that the greater part of the Christian Church believed was opened up by St. Paul’s prayer to Onesiphorous in 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 16.<sup>148</sup>

### Conclusion.

In all that has been said here on eternal punishment, Gladstone was addressing faithful and practising Christians. He claimed Christians had neither the competence nor the authority to judge non-believers of whatever shape, form or creed. He was content to echo the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 12-13.

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<sup>144</sup> Farrar, *Eternal Hope*, p. xlv = ‘V’. The *WJB, II, Analogy*, Part One, Chapter 1, Section 2, note and *SSB* pp. 249 ff.

<sup>145</sup> Gladstone, *SSB* p.254.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251 and p. 253.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 251-52.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p.253.

After all, it is none of my business to judge outsiders. God will judge them. But should you not judge the members of your own fellowship? As the Scripture says 'Remove evil from your group'.<sup>149</sup>

Christ had refused to answer the question "Lord, are there few to be saved?" Instead as the parable of the talents shows, Christ and the Father will judge men on their natural good or their natural evil; their fate was foretold in Matthew chapter 25, in the parable of the sheep and the goats: that all good is really good done in Christ; and all evil, evil against Christ.<sup>150</sup> In this, as in all things, Gladstone unequivocally strove to obey the voice of God and was not as A. N. Wilson has recently described him, "the Prince of Humbug".<sup>151</sup>

Even if Gladstone was attempting to reinvigorate a traditional Anglican atonement based theology via inductivist metaphysics, he was no unthinking theological conservative unprepared to engage in contemporary debate or read on opinions he found personally distasteful, perhaps even loathsome, in offering false human platitudes in the place of divine revelation.<sup>152</sup> His clarion call of trust and patience in God show him at once to be both conservative yet theologically liberal enough to allow reasoned, scriptural speculation, provided this was not taught as dogmatic or given as the only answer to the problem of sin and evil in the universe.

In terms of the overall employment of his apologetic, several important factors emerge from Gladstone's engagement with future life and eternal punishment. His predilection for a modified form of conditional immortality and rejection of the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul reveal a mind not rigidly bound by received Anglican doctrine. However, as this was combined with a firm belief in eternal punishment, any broadening trends in Gladstone's later thought ought to be located within a liberal-conservative apologetic in defence of the key foundations of revealed religion.

This topic also shows Gladstone to have had a deep and firm belief in scripturally based dogma that had received the binding authority of the universal

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<sup>149</sup> GP Add Mss 44698, f. 466. 1876 memo. Quote from the *Good News Bible*.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 422.

<sup>151</sup> A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians*, (London, 2002), p. 250.

<sup>152</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 220. On universalism as "... the offspring of impatience in combination with despair... I speak on it...in terms of repugnance". See also, 'The Courses of Religious Thought', Reprinted from the '*Contemporary Review*', (6 June 1876) in *Gleanings*, Vol. III, Historical and Speculative, pp. 119-20.



Church and to leave remaining doubts to the providential care of God. When dealing with the terminology of eternal punishment and analysing the contemporary debate, Gladstone distances himself from careless and unprofitable theological speculation. For most of his views, he follows the method of reserve and probability derived from Butler. In contrast to areas such as science and inspiration, for example, the arguments *ad hominem* (in addition to his method) on the future life make a larger impact. In the end this topic reveals Gladstone to be open and capable of changing his views whilst operating within the limits of his apologetic.

This whole chapter is an elaboration on a point conveyed to Sir Thomas Dyke Acland in December 1893:

I am rather more painfully impressed with the apprehension that the seen world is gaining upon the unseen. The vast expansion of its apparatus seems to have nothing to balance it. The Church which was the appointed instrument of the world's recovery seems unequal to its work. I doubt however, whether any effectual & permanent efforts can be made except within its precincts (largely viewed) and under its laws.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> GP Add Mss 44549, f. 162. Gladstone to T. D. Acland, 3 December 1893. See also diary entry for the same day, Vol. 13 1892 - 1896, p. 332.

## CHAPTER FIVE. SCIENCE, EVOLUTION AND CHRISTIANITY.

### Introduction.

Mr Gladstone watched these things [advances in scientific knowledge] vaguely and with misgiving; instinct must have told him that the advance of natural explanation, whether legitimately or not, would be in some degree at the expense of the supernatural. But from any full or serious examination of the details of the scientific movement he stood aside, safe and steadfast within the citadel of tradition.<sup>1</sup>

With few exceptions historians have heeded this analysis and have ignored or downplayed Gladstone's engagement with natural science during the second half of the nineteenth century<sup>2</sup>. Usually this subject has merited only a cursory examination of the duel between Gladstone and Thomas Henry Huxley in late 1885 and early 1886. This was over the scientific importance of the Hebrew account of creation given in the first two chapters of Genesis. This chapter attempts to redress the balance by discussing the aforementioned controversy as part of Gladstone's theological and intellectual apologetic. It is preceded by an examination of his wider views on the nature and scope of scientific knowledge in general, and Evolution and Darwinism in particular.

Perhaps one reason for the relative neglect of Gladstone's engagement with natural science is provided by Alvar Ellegård when discussing the broader context of reactions to *Origins of Species* in the 1860s. He comments that only a small proportion of those who took sides in the Darwinian debate had even a rudimentary knowledge of the facts on which the theory was based. Indeed, only at the very highest level was the debate centred on the fundamental problems that the theory raised on matters such as the teleological interpretation of nature, scientific epistemology and the relationship of both to

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<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Gladstone*, Vol. 1, Popular edition, (1907), p.156.

<sup>2</sup> Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 231-41; B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, pp. 344-49; 'Gladstone's Theological Politics' in M. Bentley, and J. Stevenson, (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain*, 28-57, especially pp. 46-47; R. M. Macleod, 'The Ayrton Incident: a Commentary on the Relations of Science and Government in England, 1870-1873', in A. Thackray, and E. Mendelsohn (eds.), *Science and Values: Patterns of Tradition and Change*, (New York, 1974), 45-78; S. J. Gould, 'Genesis and Geology. Are You Interested in the Rock of Ages or the Ages of Rocks?', *Natural History*, (September, 1988), 12-20; N. P. Hickerson, 'Gladstone's Ethnolinguistics: The Language of Experience in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 29, no. 1, (1983) 26-41; and E. H. Bellemer, 'The Statesman and the Ophthalmologist: Gladstone on the Evolution of Human Colour Vision. One Small Episode of the Nineteenth Century Darwinian Debate', *Annals of Science*, Vol 56, part 1, (1999), 25-45. Note that Hickerson, Bellemer and Gould are not historians.



the crucial area of human morality.<sup>3</sup> All these areas were of pressing concern to Gladstone in his later years. Moreover, although he admitted on many occasions that he lacked the detailed, technical knowledge with which to engage with Darwinism, this did not prevent him from discussing the above issues in a wider philosophical framework.

### Intellectual Engagement with Science.

It was not until the 1870s that Gladstone began to take a detailed interest in contemporary science. Before then he had had a detached relationship to science and scientists. In the 1840s he had read with interest the sensational *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, later referring to it in his defence of the Mosaic Cosmogony. Preserved in the Gladstone papers is a memorandum on 'Butler and the Vestiges of Creation', probably written in July 1847.<sup>4</sup> In it Gladstone wrote, "there is nothing in his account of the production of man which ought in the slightest degree to shake the faith of the Christian. If the advance of nature through ascending species and kingdoms during the lapse of ages means merely that it has pleased God to place His material works in progression and let the lower proceed the higher, this is comparable to the account in the book of Genesis..." If God had formed humanity out of the dust, if as Sallust said '*alterum nobis cum dis, alterum cum beluis commune est*', then evolution by way of natural generation of the higher from the lower forms is also not contrary to scripture. This doctrine may be improbable, but there is still nothing to shock faith by believing it possible.<sup>5</sup> This is as far as Gladstone could agree with the argument of *Vestiges* because it was too rigidly founded on a philosophically materialist and necessitarian scheme.<sup>6</sup>

There is also an interesting memorandum dated by Gladstone to September 12, 1863 on the defence of the argument from design. It shows that when Gladstone came to deal with such an issue the limited nature of human faculties to distinguish between the abstract and the philosophical is uppermost on his mind. Whatever one's stand on the scientific merits of the design argument it would be the grossest importunity for man to

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<sup>3</sup> A. Ellegård, *Darwin and The General Reader. The Reception of Darwin's Theory of Evolution in the British Periodical Press, 1859-1872*, (Chicago, 1990), originally published 1957, pp. 332-33.

<sup>4</sup> See diary reading for 12-17 July 1847, Vol. 3, 1840 - 1847, pp. 634-35. There is a note in the entry of 17 July, writing on *Vestiges* that Matthew claimed as untraced but is probably this memo.

<sup>5</sup> GP Add Mss 44731 ff. 75-76. The Latin is from Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, p. 2, Loeb edition, English translation by J. C. Rolfe, (Massachusetts, 1921, reprinted 1995). "All our power, on contrary, lies in both mind and body; we employ the mind to rule, the body rather to serve; *the one we have in common with the Gods, the other with the brutes*". The excerpt used by Gladstone is in italics.



neglect indirect evidence, "viz - that of facts revealed by the Almighty". "For if the being who unites in Himself all the Power and all the wisdom & all the Goodness whereof nature speaks to us condescends to assure us of His own infinity, by methods agreeable to our constitution, all reason is that we should believe this word".<sup>7</sup>

Gladstone's membership of the Metaphysical Society in the 1870s had brought him into contact with the major scientists such as Huxley, John Tyndall and John Lubbock. His involvement with the biologist and palaeontologist Richard Owen had begun in the early 1860s in the plans to create a natural history museum.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as Roy Macleod pointed out, "though highly respectful of individual scientists, Gladstone had little sense of what science, and the scientific method, represented".<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, as late as 1896 in a moment of reminiscence, Gladstone exclaimed, "Scientific men talk a great deal too confidently on many points".<sup>10</sup> In a letter to George Vance Smith of 1874 Gladstone had already written:

you refer to modern scientific men. You would do me a favour if you would define the phrase. If it means the observer of the facts of external nature, I (with others), am very much indebted to all such investigations, but I see nothing in their pursuits, or in their work as a body, to invest them with special authority in regard to the greatest questions of history, philosophy and religious belief.<sup>11</sup>

During his first government, Gladstone revealed a bungling and procrastinating nature in a serious incident with the director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, Joseph Dalton Hooker. His refusal to commit himself unequivocally to the cause of science and his failure to perceive the importance of scientific knowledge and research as a national industrial and military asset was to forfeit a large amount of scientific goodwill. It also reinforced the growing opinion of Huxley and Tyndall that Gladstone was an intellectual opportunist.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, it would be mistaken to think of Gladstone as having a fundamental antipathy to science as an intellectual endeavour. He never shared the anti-scientific

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 77-80.

<sup>7</sup> GP Add Mss 44752, f. 324.

<sup>8</sup> A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, (Yale, 1998), p. 258. Gladstone used *Vestiges* in his reply to Huxley in January 1886. R. Shannon, *Gladstone. Peel's Inheritor, 1809-1865*, p. 465; M. Girouard, *Alfred Waterhouse and the Natural History Museum*, (London, 2002: originally published 1981), pp. 13-14.

<sup>9</sup> Macleod, *Ayrton Incident*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> L. Tollemache, *Talks with Mr. Gladstone*, Third revised edition, (London, 1903), p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> BL GP Add Mss 44,442, ff. 519-20, Gladstone to Vance Smith, 28 June 1874.

<sup>12</sup> Macleod, 'Ayrton Incident' pp. 57-70.



prejudices and latitudinarian labelling of, for example, geology prevalent amongst Oxford Tractarians such as Keble, Thomas Mozley, Newman, Froude and Pusey.<sup>13</sup> In April 1874, Gladstone wrote to Döllinger about the adverse reaction to religious dogma since his first meeting with the German theologian in 1845. He stated that he did not share the prevailing fashion to ascribe loss of belief to the results of physical science and its research methods. Indeed, science may have actually been a benefit by exposing and destroying traditional superstition in spite of the fact that this had weakened the 'ill-grounded faith of some'.<sup>14</sup>

In essence,

The sum of the matter, in my mind is this,  
'Science' on her own ground is valuable, nay invaluable. But where Scientism trespasses on the ground belonging to Theology and Philosophy - as in other days Theology domineered over the territory of science - it becomes no better than an impudent imposition and must expect like other impostors to be detected and chastised.<sup>15</sup>

So why did Gladstone devote so much time and effort to thinking about the nature and ramifications of scientific knowledge? In particular, why was it only in the 1870s, and not immediately after Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, that Gladstone at last turned to an examination of Darwinian theory?

Richard Shannon in his biography of Gladstone has suggested that Gladstone's close examination of Darwinism in the 1870s was prompted by Darwin's publication, in 1871, of *The Descent of Man*. As a key intellectual event of the time and in its application of natural selection by the co-originator of the hypothesis, it had to be confronted by all thinking people.<sup>16</sup> While this may in general have been true, in Gladstone's case it is not a complete explanation. His diary (admittedly not an unproblematic source due to its incompleteness) only records him reading *The Descent of Man* once in July 1871.<sup>17</sup> His personal copy, now at St. Deiniol's library, is not annotated, suggesting the lack of a close and sustained reading.

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<sup>13</sup> N. A. Rupke, *The Great Chain of History. William Buckland and the English School of Geology 1814-1869*, (Oxford, 1983), pp. 267-74, Chapter 20.

<sup>14</sup> GP Add Mss 44140 f. 293, Gladstone to Döllinger, 21 April 1874. See diary, Vol. 8 July 1871 - December 1874, p. 485.

<sup>15</sup> GP Add Mss 44766 f. 184. Memorandum 'Ph.' 15 December 1881.

<sup>16</sup> Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898*, p. 116 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Read 7/7/71, H. C. G. Matthew, (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries*. Vol. 7 January 1869 - June 1871, p. 3.

Instead, and additional to Shannon's point, Gladstone's interest in Evolution/Darwinism was linked with his attempt to combat general religious scepticism and unbelief. In the years 1872-1874, this is brought out in several published and unpublished pieces.

This link between science and scepticism was also made by Gladstone in private to J. B. Walsh, Lord Ormathwaite. The latter had sent Gladstone his book *Astronomy and Geology Compared* (1872). In a letter of thanks, in which Gladstone expressed his pleasure at the book, he admitted that he was little acquainted with the works of Darwin. He again denounced the truly portentous avidity of Scientism leaping to ulterior conclusions that the evidence hardly supported. At this point the link between the scientist's pretensions and unbelief is made plain. "But I do not believe it is given to Mr. Darwin or Mr. Buckle to sweep away the fabric of belief which has stood the handling of 1800 years of stronger men perhaps than any now alive".<sup>18</sup>

In an undated note of later years, Gladstone wrote:

I confess myself to be one of those who view with great alarm the modes of thought and reasoning which extensively prevail in the present day with respect to questions bearing on religious belief. It seems to be not so much the conclusion as the assumption of many among our men of letters, and of the popular sciences, for which a monopoly of the name is unduly claimed, that there neither are nor in reason can be such things as miracle, prediction, revelation. If we ask, where are the arguments to be found set out with due weight, care and method, which can sustain so great a conclusion, or which even purport to sustain it, I for one must answer that I do not know. In other times, those who thought a religion untenable likewise thought they were bound to do battle seriously against it. In our day, perhaps out of respect to what is felt venerable and to all the feelings and convictions which still obstinately cluster around it, judgement seems to be passed upon the Christian dogma by default.<sup>19</sup>

The counterattack began publicly with Gladstone's address delivered at the distribution of prizes at Liverpool College on 21 December 1872, and later published in an expanded version.<sup>20</sup> Gladstone was concerned to defend the intellectual and moral

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<sup>18</sup> See diary 29 December 1871 and 13 and 14 January 1872.

<sup>19</sup> GP Add Mss 44744 ff. 151-52. No date given, but bound with documents dated to 1854. However, the style of handwriting would place this at a somewhat later date.

<sup>20</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Address Delivered at the Distribution of Prizes in the Liverpool College, Dec. 21. 1872. With an Introduction and Illustrative Passages*, (London, 1873).



integrity of Christianity against recent sceptical attacks, especially those of the German rationalist theologian David Friederich Strauss and the reply by Jakob Frohschammer. He attempted to defend the study of theology as at least as scientific as the study of nature. The problem was "... a widespread vice; a scepticism in the public mind, of old as well as young, respecting the value of learning and culture, and a consequent slackness in seeking their attainment".<sup>21</sup> It led to the following remarks:

Upon the ground of what is termed Evolution, God is relieved of the labour of Creation; in the name of unchangeable laws, He is discharged from governing the world; and His function of government is also dispensed with...<sup>22</sup>

Then in a comment upon Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*,

He divides the field of thought between them. To Science he awards all that of which we know, or may know, something; to Religion, he leaves a far wider clearing - that of which we know, and can know nothing. This sounds like jest, but it is melancholy earnest; and I doubt whether any such noxious crop has been gathered in such abundance from the press of England in any former year of our History as this present year of our redemption, eighteen hundred and seventy two.<sup>23</sup>

The speech caused a minor furore, but it led to a short correspondence with Spencer that linked in with themes Gladstone was discussing with other correspondents and his reading at that time<sup>24</sup>. The underlying cause was that Spencer had publicly accused Gladstone in 1871 of being a typical clerical opponent of science and evolution. Gladstone denied this, claiming he did not oppose evolution or unchangeable scientific laws. He merely condemned the unwarranted inferences some scientists drew from these as they related to the nature of knowledge. He wrote thus,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> *The Times* of 9 January 1873 commented that Gladstone's address was "an exaggerated claim". From Gladstone to S. Wilberforce, Bishop of Winchester, Wilberforce Mss d. 38. Bodleian Library, 9 January 1873. Quoted in *Diaries*, Vol. 8 *loc cit.*, p. 269. Gladstone also wrote to Friederich Max Müller: "I performed my duty at Liverpool in considerable trouble of mind, but under a Drang which I really could not resist. Your kind letter cheers me. I took Strauss' book as a manifesto: I suppose *Bekennniss* might be so translated", Max Müller Mss, d. 170. Bodleian Library, Gladstone to Max Müller, 24 December 1872. See also, Clayton, *Enlarging the Text*, pp. 195-96.

The words [with] which I think Madame de Staël ends *Corrine* are best for me: Je ne veux ni la blâmer, ne l'absoudre: Before I could presume to give an opinion on evolution, or unchangeable laws, I should wish to know more clearly and more fully than I yet know, the meaning attached to these phrases by the chief apostle of the doctrines; and very likely even after accomplishing this preliminary stage, I might find myself insufficiently supplied with the knowledge required to draw the line between true and false.<sup>25</sup>

The essence of the dispute is the nature of all knowledge. Gladstone denied that inductivism could disprove God, whereas Spencer argued that, precisely because of the uniformity of law, Divine creation and naturalistic evolution were mutually exclusive. For Gladstone, this would imply the unwarranted consequence that science and religion must necessarily be at war. To Gladstone such a view would be tantamount to blasphemy, as well as being irrational, premature and *a priori*. All truth, including the uniformity of law, is from God.<sup>26</sup>

Gladstone does not, however, appear to have recognised a weakness in his argument. Writing to Friederich Max Müller he admitted that he lacked the scientific knowledge necessary to deal with the Darwinian question. Nevertheless, "I feel less unable to deal with the non-physical part of the subject here, according to my ever strengthening conviction, the strength of belief lies in Butler...his method of handling... the only one known to me that is fitted to guide life, and thought bearing upon life, in the face of the nineteenth century".<sup>27</sup>

Paradoxically, Gladstone's reliance on Butler's doctrine of probability as the guide to life was ultimately self-defeating in its application to science in the late nineteenth century. Gladstone seems to have been unaware of this. At the same time as his debate with Spencer, Gladstone was, as we have seen, involved in a detailed exchange of ideas with the young George Herbert, Thirteenth Earl of Pembroke. Pembroke pointed out to Gladstone the danger of relying on the argument that probable evidence entailed the *obligation* of belief. On the basis of probability, science and religion would have to be believed on evidence of like worth. It is inconsistent to demand of religion and scientific theories an amount of evidence continually dispensed with in the ordinary course of life.

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<sup>25</sup> GP Add Mss 44441, ff. 171-74. Reprint in proof of Gladstone's letter to the *Contemporary Review* of 7 November 1873. Spencer's charge appeared in a new edition of *First Principles*.

<sup>26</sup> GP Add Mss 44442, ff. 35-40, Gladstone to Spencer, 12 January 1874; ff. 43-48, Spencer to Gladstone, 14 January 1874; f. 59, Gladstone to Spencer, 15 January 1874; ff. 68-70, Spencer to Gladstone, 17 January 1874. The letters by Gladstone are all copies.

<sup>27</sup> Max Müller Mss d. 170, Gladstone to Max Müller, 24 December 1872.



The best (or most probable) evidence does not, cannot, compel belief - we act on trust.<sup>28</sup>

Pembroke commented,

Now the general testimony of science is to the effect that the study of the laws by which the universe is regulated, those that affect mankind amongst them, gives as much right to lay down the law about the nature or moral character of the Creative power, as the study of the works of a watch would give to us to lay down the law about the appearance and opinions of the watchmaker; and moreover points out that the origin and real nature of everything that exists are a mystery that seems by their nature impossible for us to solve... Now as science (inductivism) on the whole distinctly disclaims at present the power of ascertaining either the nature or the moral character of this creative power, from observations of created phenomenon, it is evident that you who lie counter with other religious people of various denominations [who] claim to have such knowledge, must have some other source real or imaginary by which you obtain it; and I have a right to ask you where you, and other religious people of many denominations, get this experience of this inscrutable power that we call God.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Gladstone's polite chiding of this argument as smacking of licence, rashness and precipitancy, it is very revealing. Gladstone's answer was essentially a circular, and a priori, argument: Divine revelation witnesses the existence of God, God testifies to the existence of Divine revelation.<sup>30</sup> Butler, in *The Analogy of Religion*, was an inductivist philosopher par excellence. He decisively rejected arguments founded upon a *priori* reasoning or insufficient evidence, that is, the hypothesis.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> GP Add Mss 4441, ff. 47-50, George Robert Charles Herbert, Thirteenth Earl of Pembroke to Gladstone, 14 November 1873, f. 48.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 49-50.

<sup>30</sup> Although nowhere stated as explicitly as this, it is the theology underlying all his remarks on Genesis. See GP Add Mss 44439, ff. 314-15, Copy, Gladstone to Pembroke, 24 August 1873; and Gladstone, 'Dawn of Creation and Worship' in *Gleanings of Past Years. Vol. VII. Theological and Ecclesiastical*, (London, 1898), 1-39 (reprinted from the *Nineteenth Century*, XVIII, (November 1885), pp. 685 ff); 'Proem to Genesis: a Plea for a Fair Trial', *Nineteenth Century*, XIX, (January 1886), pp. 1-21; *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture. Revised and Enlarged from 'Good Words'*, (London, 1890, hereafter cited as *IR*), pp. 9-26, 31-84 and 217-28; and 'General Introduction to Sheppard's Pictorial Bible' in *Later Gleanings. A New Series of Gleanings of Past Years. Theological and Ecclesiastical*, (New York, 1897), pp. 352-403.

<sup>31</sup> *Butler's Analogy of Religion Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, edited by the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone, (London, 1907, World Classics edition). Original edition 1896, pp. 6-11, introduction, section 9, "Forming our notions of the Constitution and government of the world upon reasoning, without foundation for the principles we assume, whether from the attributes of God, or anything else, is building a world upon hypothesis, like Descartes. Forming our notions upon reasoning from principles which are certain but are applied to cases to which we have no ground to apply them, (like those who explain the structures of the human body, and the nature of



Later it will be shown how Gladstone's reliance on Homer and early Greek literature led him to pre-conceived ideas of revelation. When dealing with scientific knowledge, Gladstone's thought resulted in epistemological failure because he stretched his basic position to accommodate theories not strictly founded on Aristotelian induction. This is because, to take an example, he regarded the knowledge contained in the Mosaic Cosmogony as relative to the spiritual and moral needs and perceptions of early man.<sup>32</sup> Yet he could not produce and justify the principles upon which to base the distinction between genuine revelation and merely human speculation, without accepting the prior reality of Divine providence guiding us in the quest for true revelation. Once complicated by ideas of a primeval revelation, the error became compounded, producing a weakness in the application of his apologetic to science.

It is possible to trace some of the influences upon Gladstone's thought in this area. The scientist and philosopher George John Romanes and the Anglican cleric and theologian Charles Adolphus Row are particularly important.<sup>33</sup> This is an interesting comment on Gladstone's reading. At the time Romanes was well known in intellectual circles, but Row less so. Row is virtually unknown to present day scholars. Gladstone annotated Romanes' *Thoughts on Religion* and Row's *Inspiration* very carefully indeed. He thought highly of both works. In a conversation with Lionel Tollemache towards the end of his life he said, "One of the younger men of science, Romanes, has struck me a good deal. I should say that he has genius".<sup>34</sup> Writing to Archbishop Manning in early 1873 Gladstone commented, "I am reading a really remarkable book called 'Inspiration, its

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diseases and medicines from mere mathematics without sufficient *data*) is an error much akin to the former: since what is assumed in order to make the reasoning applicable, is hypothesis".

<sup>32</sup> E.g. *Dawn of Creation*, pp. 5-8, 10, 22 and 25. Here Gladstone uses a form of *a priori* reasoning unacceptable to the non-theist/Christian. Referring to George Salmonds' *Introduction to the New Testament*, (London, 1885), p. ix, namely that if one allows (assumes?) the existence of a creator, one must allow such a being to communicate with the creatures He has made. See also, *Proem to Genesis* pp.6-7, 8-9; and *IR* p. 37 (that the Mosaic Cosmogony "can only be a communication from the Most High; a communication to man and for the use of man, therefore in a form adopted to his mind and use"), especially pp. 42-50 and pp. 57-58 and p. 60 ("For an explosion of detail to primitive man would have led to bewilderment and mental confusion. As it stands the Mosaic narrative conveys definite ideas in a way contemporaries would have been able to comprehend"); *Sheppard's Pictorial Bible* (hereafter cited as *SPB*), p. 361 and pp. 379-83.

<sup>33</sup> George John Romanes (1848-1894). Evolutionary biologist. Educated at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. At one time considered ordination in the Anglican Church. His scientific researches effectively undermined his attachment to Christian dogma, although he remained hopeful, and in his heart, desirous to return to the fold of the Church. This desire is evident in his later writings, such as that posthumously edited by Charles Gore. Roger Smith, (Oxford DNB, 2004-5). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24038>.

<sup>34</sup> Tollemache, *Talks with Gladstone*, p. 72.



nature and extent' by a clergyman named Row. I incline it the most Butlerian book of the age, though it is not in every respect satisfactory to me".<sup>35</sup>

In his annotation of Romanes, Gladstone, somewhat contradictorily, denied that any set of pre-conceived ideas are the arbiter of belief.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, he accepted Romanes' argument that probability and hypothesis lead one to postulate intelligent design in nature and, therefore, an intelligent designer.<sup>37</sup> Gladstone agreed with Charles Gore's summary of Romanes' argument: that since scientific ratiocination cannot be an adequate ground for belief in God, God may have revealed Himself by other means than this. Effectively all the human faculties, natural and super-added<sup>38</sup> alike (e.g. conscience, emotion, experience) are needed to argue for a belief in God and against the pretensions of some agnostic and materialistic scientists.<sup>39</sup> This is another insight into Gladstone's views on the nature of the clerisy.

Here, Gladstone is disagreeing with the argument that the apparent conflict between science and religion is solely reducible to the idea of the validity of a supernatural revelation. Furthermore, even if this was shown not to be the case, one could judge sufficiently, on probable grounds, whether the Bible was or was not supernaturally inspired. However, as Pembroke had pointed out, or as any agnostic such as Huxley or Samuel Laing<sup>40</sup> would, this argument was ultimately based on trust, i.e. faith. Without such faith in a pre-existent creator the argument would be so much question-begging.

Gladstone's annotation of Row's book shows that he was aware of this view. Row categorically rejected a priori arguments on the basis that they were unable to teach the truths of the Universe without a Divine revelation. His is a somewhat conflicting argument.<sup>41</sup> Row also commented, "Are not many of the truths conveyed by God's acting's in nature relative truths? Particular stages of human civilisation are only capable

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<sup>35</sup> GP Add Mss 44250, f. 93, Gladstone to Archbishop Manning, 16 February 1873.

<sup>36</sup> *Thoughts on Religion. By the Late George John Romanes. Edited by Charles Gore*, (London, 1895), p. 25. Gladstone's annotation is 'XX'.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18, Gladstone - 'VI'.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110. The phrase is Gladstone's own.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107. Gladstone has written - 'V'.

<sup>40</sup> See notes on Pembroke. For Laing see GP Add Mss 44504, ff. 190-191 Gladstone to Laing, 17 August 1888, ff. 202-11, Laing to Gladstone, 22 August 1888; 44507, ff. 249-54, Gladstone to Laing, 9 September 1888, ff. 259-61, 13 September 1888.

<sup>41</sup> C. A. Row, *The Nature and Extent of Inspiration, As Stated by the Writers, and Deduced, From, the Facts, of the New Testament*, (London, 1864), p. 53. Gladstone has marked, 'I'. Note that Gladstone signed and dated his copy 1873 and Vol. 7 of the *Gladstone Diaries* shows he read it on 26/1/73 and 16/2/73.

of low views respecting the Divine character..."<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, where is the dividing line? (Other than in adopting pre-conceived ideas about the contents of revelation, not deducible from consideration of the text alone.) Indeed, Gladstone even wrote "why?" to Row's querying whether theology founded upon such pre-conceived ideas necessarily flowed from the Biblical text itself or was, rather, a product of the barren speculation of the human intellect far beyond the limits of its powers.<sup>43</sup> This is ironic given Gladstone's strictures on premature avidity and aversion to speculation.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, at the time of the Liverpool speech during which Gladstone read Row, had he not written to Stanley Jevons denouncing the exaggerated claims of science? This was in answer to the receipt and reading of the economist's book, *The Principles of Science*:

What there is gives ambiguity and latent fallacy in much that we hear about 'uniformity of laws'-

That we are not warranted in predicting, of time and space themselves, that they are necessarily conditions of all existence.

That there is real insoluble mystery in some of the formulae of mathematics.

That we are in danger from the precipitancy and intellectual tyranny of speculation.

That the limits of our real knowledge are (if I may use the word) infinitely narrow.

That we are not rationally justified in passing our own inward perceptions of things inward, and confirming the sphere of knowledge of things outward.<sup>45</sup>

One of the most attractive points of Jevons' last chapter for Gladstone was in using the analogy of Charles Babbage's computation machine to argue that uniformity of law was not inconsistent with diversity and interruption in mathematics. Hence creation via progress in nature was scientifically feasible.<sup>46</sup>

Writing in private in 1880, Gladstone observed that even the best, fallible, human means of reasoning are subject to certain limitations also observable in the natural world.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72. Gladstone- 'II V'.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95. Gladstone - 'II why?' Against the following, "They raise an important question as to the reality of a large mass of metaphysical theology, and whether such theology consists of truths necessarily flowing from the statements contained in revelation, or whether it is not mere barren speculations of the human intellect, extending its researches into regions far beyond the limits of its powers".

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four on future retribution.

<sup>45</sup> GP Add Mss 44443, f. 229, Gladstone to Jevons, copy, 10 May 1874.



He took for granted that in 'common judgement' there is an acceptance of natural and moral law. Yet there may be a degree of error involved in the whole idea. "But error is kept within this margin by means of latent adaptations which we can neither reduce to rule nor be sure to observe". Therefore the natural world, the Universe itself, cannot be fully comprehended solely by means of scientific positivism.<sup>47</sup>

Atheism and materialism are not the inherent corollary or result of the scientific method. Even here there was a sting in the tail for Gladstone, (from an author he praised as "eminently Butlerian") since Jevons had also written "... all our physical sciences do not enable us to predict the way two days hence with any great probability..."<sup>48</sup> All knowledge is to some extent dependent upon *a priori* assumptions. One of Gladstone's greatest failures in his duel with Huxley over the Mosaic Cosmogony was his failure to perceive that his own prior assumptions muddied the argument and clouded his judgement.

Gladstone's reading on science again provided the occasion to engage on the nature of scientific knowledge in a series of memoranda written in December 1881. This was the result of his reading of William Graham's *The Creed of Science. Religious, Moral and Social*.<sup>49</sup> This book is heavily annotated by Gladstone who is mainly hostile to its arguments. Graham, though not wholly uncritically, accepts positivism in its rejection of a reality beyond the material world. He combines this, strangely, with a strand of post-Kantian idealism that sets very definite limits to the power of scientific explanation in favour of a form of ill-defined monism.

To take just one example of Gladstone's reaction to these views one need only observe his exasperation at Graham's desire to give up the 'old anthropomorphic creator' and yet contend, as Gladstone has written, 'For purpose without person!' From the context it is clear that Gladstone could not accept Graham's claim that the universe needs purpose, perhaps even a creative agency, without a personal creator, merely the manifestation of a universally diffused spirit will.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> W. S. Jevons, *The Principles of Science. A Treatise on Logic and Scientific Method*, (London, 1874), Vol. II, Book VI, chapter XXXI, 'Reflections on the Results and Limits of Scientific Method', pp. 437-38.

<sup>47</sup> GP Add Mss 44764 f. 91, 30 May 1880. See diary Vol. 9 *loc cit.*, p. 532.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 458.

<sup>49</sup> Read according to the diary on the 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13-18 December 1881. For William Graham (1839-1911) see Thomas Duddy (ed.), 'Introduction', *Irish Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century: Epistemology and Metaphysics*, (Bristol, 2002), pp. vii-xxvii.

<sup>50</sup> Graham, *Creed of Science*, pp. 50-52.

Reading Graham's book stimulated Gladstone to refine his own position in regard to the nature of scientific knowledge. In a letter to Graham thanking him for his book and restating his belief in the harmony between science and religion, Gladstone also stated that he was "a determined rebel against (what seems to me) the dogmatism of science".<sup>51</sup>

If Graham could argue that science is the only method applicable to the phenomenal world, Gladstone retorted that experience itself demonstrates such a phenomenal world is 'fragmentary, incomplete, anomalous' and cries out for some purpose beyond.<sup>52</sup> In a rare display of Kantian terminology Gladstone contended,

The phenomenal world if there be not what they call a noumenal world is so to speak self-convicted of radical folly: of providing means most marvellous, without an end: of failure in the main.<sup>53</sup>

Such a demand rooted in nature shows that there is more than just phenomenal existence. Empiricism as a philosophy was redundant. The existence of electricity shows that there exists an entity of which the senses cannot take physical cognisance. Electrical force may be material, 'but in what sense is it phenomenal?'

Where it is averred that there are things of which we have cognisance and which notwithstanding are not phenomenal, we must avoid sliding into the assumption that because the cognisance is real and the object non-phenomenal, we possess in such cases an absolute certainty. Our knowledge whether of things mental or things material, of phenomenal or non-phenomenal is knowledge only probable and of degree.<sup>54</sup>

Again the conclusion is plain: "materialism, when closely examined, gives no philosophical support to Atheism".<sup>55</sup> If one accepts the material, yet non-physical, reality of electricity why not, *mutatis mutandi*, thought? Scientists, like Graham, indulging in grand unfounded claims and extending their conclusions into the realm of theology and philosophy [what Gladstone means by scientism] have no right to assume that we fully

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<sup>51</sup> GP Ad Mss 44454 f. 67, Gladstone to Graham, 5 December 1881. See also diary Vol. 10 January 1881 – June 1883, p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> GP Add Mss 44476 f. 178 'Ph', 14 December 1881.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 178-79.

<sup>54</sup> GP Add Mss 44766 f. 185 'Ph', 16 December 1881.



comprehend the laws of nature, nor even their variety. "There may be states and forms of matter exceeding the very highest known to us, in as great a degree as, nay in a far greater degree than the highest of these within our present knowledge exceeds the lowest".<sup>56</sup>

Bearing in the mind all the above, Gladstone still made some pertinent points on Darwinian evolution. Moreover, it is possible to show that his views on evolution, but not natural selection, gradually softened over time.<sup>57</sup> Like many contemporaries, believers and non-believers alike, he viewed the subject largely in relation to the post-Darwinian argument for design as compatible with the existence of God.<sup>58</sup> By the 1890s Gladstone had developed a sophisticated argument that is best approached by studying some of his earlier remarks.

Boyd Hilton, in his chapter discussing Gladstone as the 'last Butlerian', mistakenly believes that Gladstone accepted Darwinism as compatible with his dispensationalist theology. He claims the support of Gladstone's *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler* for this view. This is a point echoed in David Bebbington's biography.<sup>59</sup> However, what Gladstone accepted was a form of theistic evolution which in many respects evaded the full consequences of accepting Darwinism. Gladstone's purpose was less to accept evolution *in toto* as to convince conservative-minded Christians like himself that they did not need to abandon the Butler-Paley design apologetic, which they were used to accepting on grounds of probability.<sup>60</sup> According to the classification scheme of James Moore, Gladstone can be seen as a 'Christian Darwinisticist': an apparent reconciliation of Darwinism and Christian doctrine that employed non-Darwinian evolutionary theories, e.g. Lamarckism.<sup>61</sup>

As his protestations to Herbert Spencer in 1873 testify and in the following written to Jevons in 1874 makes plain, by the early 1870s at the latest Gladstone had accepted evolution as a provisional thesis:

<sup>55</sup> GP Add Mss 44766 f. 187 'Ph', 16 December 1881.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, GP Add Mss, 44250, f. 234, Archbishop Manning to Gladstone, 7 January 1886, "I cannot treat Darwinism with as much courtesy as you do".

<sup>58</sup> P. Hinchliff, *Frederick Temple. Archbishop of Canterbury. A Life*, (Oxford, 1988). An editorial comment by Dr. Grayson Carter, "Whereas in the early nineteenth century the argument was *from* design to the existence of God, in the wake of Darwin it became an argument *for* design as compatible with the existence of God".

<sup>59</sup> Hilton, *Age of Atonement*, p. 344; and Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone*, p. 232.

<sup>60</sup> Hinchliff, *Frederick Temple*, p. 185 and p. 191.

I must say that the doctrine of Evolution, if it be true, enhances in my judgement the proper idea of the greatness of God, for it makes every stage of creation a legible prophecy of all those which are to follow it.<sup>62</sup>

In a memorandum dated December 17 1881, Gladstone explains what he thinks he means by such an acceptance:

It is attempted by means of the Darwinian doctrines of selection and heredity to overthrow the argument of design. But it may be held 1. That there is great exaggeration in the statement of the doctrine which goes beyond experience and contradicts it. 2. That if they be allowed in their extremist form they have no adverse bearing whatever on the argument of design but rather tend to enhance design by showing it to be more complex, comprehensive, elaborate... But who made the laws: that is to say who impressed upon them different orders of being, the upward tendency of selection and the conserving tendency of heredity? The more persistent and widespread these 'laws', the more wonderful the design which made them.<sup>63</sup>

Those again like Graham in *The Creed of Science*, (p. 405) who extend the mechanism of natural selection from the laws of physical nature to the realm of morality stand condemned. If the fundamental law of natural selection is 'the dropping of the weak and inferior specimens, preference and prominence for the stronger', then how can 'evolutional morality' lead to an enlargement of human nature and sympathy?<sup>64</sup> Evolution, as a concept, could be accepted within the wider apologetic framework of Gladstone, whereas the doctrine of natural selection could not.

Gladstone would develop such views in a series of articles written later in the decade.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless even he qualifies his acceptance of evolution as an explanation for the origin of man. Writing in 1885 he comments,

Evolution, that is physical evolution, which alone is in view, may be true (like the solar theory), may be delightful and wonderful, in its right place; but are we really to understand that varieties of animals

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<sup>61</sup> J. R. Moore, *The Post Darwinian Controversies. A Study of Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwinism in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900*, (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 218-19.

<sup>62</sup> GP Add Mss 44493, f. 230, Gladstone to Jevons, copy, 10 May 1874.

<sup>63</sup> Memorandum by Gladstone. GP Add Mss, 44766, ff. 189-90.

<sup>64</sup> GP Add Mss 44766 f. 193 'Ph', 18 December 1881.

<sup>65</sup> See Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, 1885; *Proem to Genesis*, 1886; *Universitas Hominum: or, The Unity of History*, *North American Review*, Vol. CXLV, No. CCCLXXIII, (December 1887), 589-602; and Colonel Ingersoll on Christianity. Some Remarks on his Reply to Dr. Field, *North American Review*, Vol. CXLVI, No. CCLXXVIII, (May 1888), 481-508, especially pp. 491-493.



brought about through domestication, the wasting of organs (for instance the tails of men) by disuse, that natural selection and survival of the fittest, all in the physical order, exhibit to use the great *arcanum* of creation, the sum and the centre of life, so that, mind and spirit are dethroned from their old supremacy, are no longer sovereign by right, but may find somewhere by charity a place assigned to them as appendages, perhaps only as excrescences, of material creation.<sup>66</sup>

To reiterate: this is not an acceptance of the Darwinian theory, in spite of accepting the possibility of the evolution of the physical body of man. The soul or conscience is still implanted by God in the creation of each new individual.<sup>67</sup> In many respects this is similar to J. H. Newman's plea in *The Idea of a University*:

What does Physical Theology tell us of duty and conscience? Of a particular providence and, coming at length to Christianity, what does it teach us even of the four last things, death, judgement, heaven and hell, the mere elements of Christianity?<sup>68</sup>

Theistic evolution, or creation through Divine design, is not coterminous with natural selection. For example, Gladstone states, "Evolution is, to me, series with development. And like series in mathematics, whether arithmetical or geometrical, it establishes in things an unbroken progression; it places each thing (if only it stand the test of ability to live) in distinct relation to every other thing, and makes each a witness to all that have proceeded it, a prophecy of all that are to follow".<sup>69</sup>

Darwinism is not, however, a straightforward linear progression from lower to higher. Indeed, the idea of inherent progression, of inherent purpose or *teleos* is completely alien to Darwin's theory. The entire meaning of natural selection is that nature has achieved order and unity without antecedent purpose. To equate this, like

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<sup>66</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Gladstone, *Colonel Ingersoll*, "...And if pride causes us to deem it an indignity that our race should have proceeded by propagation from an ascending scale of inferior organisms, why should it be a more repulsive idea to have sprung immediately from something less than man in brain and body, than to have been fashioned according to expression in Genesis (chap. II, v. 7) 'out of the dust of the ground?'..."

<sup>68</sup> Rupke, *The Great Chain of History*, p. 271. [I. T. Kerr, (Oxford, 1990), edited the edition quoted.]

<sup>69</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, p. 18. See also, GP Add Mss 44105, ff. 149-50, Argyll to Gladstone, 13 February 1883. Here, Argyll expounds to Gladstone a teleological, linear progression of life on definitely non-Darwinian grounds. Perhaps a source for Gladstone's later, published, views. See also P. J. Bowler, 'Darwinism and Victorian Values: Threat or Opportunity', in T. C. Smout (ed.), *Victorian Values: A Joint Symposium of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 78, (Oxford, 1992), p. 133.



natural theology, with design is a function of prior and extra Christian faith. It is not part of the experimental mechanism of the theory.<sup>70</sup> In his views, Gladstone was not alone. A famous contemporary example is Frederick Temple's 1884 Bampton Lectures, *The Relations Between Religion and Science*.<sup>71</sup> A close examination will show that Gladstone shared many of Temple's avowedly apologetic assumptions. What John Kent has shown for Temple is equally applicable to Gladstone. There was no sign that Darwinism was compelling any change of theological outlook. In fact, both were really rejecting Darwinism despite appearances to the contrary. Science is being interpreted by a prior faith commitment. Gladstone never left the philosophical and apologetic tradition of Anglican Christianity.<sup>72</sup>

Gladstone could even use arguments derived from Aristotle to underpin this approach to evolution. Aubrey Moore in December 1885 advised Gladstone, "Like Haeckel says of Moses (History of Creation. Vol. 1. p. 38) we can say of Aristotle that what ever his scientific shortcomings, he has revealed "the great and fundamental idea of progressive development".<sup>73</sup> Further that "the elimination of chance means the omnipotence of law", and this "combined with what we know of the interaction of all parts of nature, means teleology, or at least immanent reason. From teleology to Theology is no great step, especially if personality is the last form in natural development".<sup>74</sup> The appeal of Aristotelianism for both Moore and Gladstone was that it was rational and metaphysical rather than materialistic and atheistic. It could be seen as the secular equivalent of the Christian view of history as unidirectional. In this light the atoning sacrifice of Christ made history one of cosmic evolution.<sup>75</sup> In Chapter One it was shown how Gladstone saw Christ as the gap or 'missing link' between heaven and earth.

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<sup>70</sup> J. H. Brooke, 'Revisiting Darwin on Order and Design', in N. H. Gregessen, and U. Görman, (eds.), *Design and Disorder: Perspectives from Science and Theology*, (London, 2002), 31-52, especially, p. 41; and P. J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism. Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades Around 1900*, (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 21-2.

<sup>71</sup> Hinchliff, *Frederick Temple*, Chapter 7, 'Religion and Science', pp. 166-193. F. Temple, *The Relations Between Religion and Science*, (London, 1885).

<sup>72</sup> J. Kent, 'Religion and Science', in N. Smart, et al, (eds.), *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Volume III, (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 17-18.

<sup>73</sup> *The History of Creation: or the Development of the Earth and its habitants by the Action of Natural Causes. A Popular Exposition of the Doctrine of Evolution, and that of Darwin, Goethe and Lamarck in Particular. From the German of Ernst Haeckel, Professor in the University of Jena. The Translation Revised by E. Ray Lankester, MA. FRS, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford. In Two Volumes. (London, 1876). Volume One.*

<sup>74</sup> GP Add Mss, 44493, ff. 215-19, 13 December 1885, A. L. Moore to Gladstone.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, Kent, *Religion and Science*, p. 14.



This is precisely a method of argument used by Gladstone on several occasions.<sup>76</sup> For example, in an 1887 article called *Universitas Hominum: or, the Unity of History*, he argued “that we can in some degree understand why it is said this little Earth, and what passes upon it may form a spectacle to men and Angels [echoing Butler]; a lesson of wonder, of sympathy, and it may be a warning, to orders of being besides and beyond our own”.<sup>77</sup> The whole history of mankind is one of progressive, purposeful evolution beginning with the childhood of the patriarchal period as described in Genesis, through the “schoolroom” of the Mosaic period, and by degrees, legibly Divine, the Jewish scriptures, the Greek language, poetry and philosophy, the Roman system of law and transport, Dante and the Italian Renaissance, and finally in the “institutions of the English speaking world”.<sup>78</sup> In an echo of the Divine creation, where Gladstone initially claimed a fourfold order of life, here he argues for a fourfold order in the Divine training (or guided evolution) of human nature: the good, the true, the great and the beautiful:<sup>79</sup>

History, then, complex and diversified as it is, and presenting to our view many a ganglion of impenetrated and perhaps impenetrable enigmas, is not a mere congeries of disjointed occurrences, but is the evolution of a purpose steadfastly maintained, and advancing towards some consummation, greater probably than the world has yet beheld, along with advancing numbers, power and knowledge, and responsibilities of the race.<sup>80</sup>

To further prove that this is no acceptance of Darwinism one need look no further than Gladstone’s views on colour sense and vision in his analysis in Volume III of *Homer and the Homeric Age*, and in subsequent studies and articles.<sup>81</sup>

In these Gladstone’s views are much more compatible with Lamarckian notions of progress and heredity (i.e. physical inheritance of acquired characteristics).<sup>82</sup> Gladstone claimed “(p)erceptions so easy and familiar to us are the result of a slow traditional growth in the knowledge and in the training of the human organ, which commenced long

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<sup>76</sup> Gladstone, *Colonel Ingersoll*, pp. 492-93; *SSB*, pp. 307-308.

<sup>77</sup> Gladstone, *Universitas Hominum*, p. 590.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 596-97.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 596-98.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 599.

<sup>81</sup> Gladstone, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, 3 Vols, (Oxford, 1858), Vol. 3, Part IV, Section IV, pp. 457-99; *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Homeric Age*, (London, 1869), Section VII, miscellaneous, pp. 544-467 and ‘The Colour Sense’, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (October, 1877), 366-88.

<sup>82</sup> Hickerson, *Gladstone’s Ethnolinguistics*, p. 30. Gladstone, *Homer*, Vol. 3, p. 496.



before we took our place in the succession of mankind". Gladstone highlighted progressive development of colour perception in human evolution from total non-recognition of colour, then a recognition of the most crude and elemental colours of black and white, to full spectral colour perception.<sup>83</sup>

It was a definite evolutionary process that accepted and borrowed theories from the scientists George Wilson and Hugo Magnus on colour perception and blindness.<sup>84</sup> By accepting Magnus' universalism, Gladstone extrapolated from the level of individuals to the level of humanity. It was an implicitly Lamarckian and non-Darwinian theory of evolution. It was compatible with the natural theology argument from design and the existence of a creator and a Divine purpose.<sup>85</sup>

Elizabeth Bellemer in noting that Gladstone left the professional biological underpinnings of the theory to Magnus (that were eventually discredited) contends that this demonstrated Gladstone's lack of insight into scientific theory. This is because he invoked natural mechanisms regardless of their degree of compatibility with each other or with Darwinism. For example, his acceptance of general stages of human evolution verged on a form of biological determinism ill at ease with either Divine design or random natural selection.<sup>86</sup> He further complicated the issue by introducing specifically Darwinian factors as operative, but not definitive, in his 1879 article on the colour sense.<sup>87</sup> Here, Gladstone comments, on Homer's (who has been taken to be blind!) use of colour epithets, "If without the aids of lengthened history, of wide survey of the earth and man,

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<sup>83</sup> In Lamarckian evolution, the habit once fixed becomes an internal directing force, controlling evolution independent of further changes in the environment. Since this is dependent upon will and cognition, as well as environmental conditions, it cannot explain the evolution of plants. Indeed, Gladstone never discusses this in terms of science. This is an important gap and oversight. Moreover, this theory could verge on biological determinism, rendering individuals like passive automata reacting to the environment in a totally random and purposeless way. Inconsistency and contradiction of argument seem to have eluded Gladstone, or at least there is no evidence of him ever recognising these implications. Bowler, *Eclipse of Darwinism* p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> Dr. Hugo Magnus was a lecturer in optical medical science at the University of Breslau. H. Magnus, *Die Geschichtliche Entwicklung des Farbensinnes*, (Leipzig, 1871). G. Wilson, *Researches on Colour Blindness*, (Edinburgh, 1855). See Bellemer, *Statesman and Ophthalmologist* pp. 26-31. The following letters in the Gladstone papers are of interest in the controversy over Gladstone's *Nineteenth Century* article. Gladstone even received a couple of letters from Charles Darwin on the subject of colour blindness. Unsurprisingly, this made no mention of broader metaphysical ramifications. A letter from the Roman Catholic biologist St. George Jackson Mivart also details the views of Alfred Russel Wallace, co-founder of natural selection, only to advise Gladstone that Wallace purports a diametrically opposed view to Gladstone's own. GP Add Mss, 44449, ff. 120-21, Darwin to Gladstone, 2 October 1877, f. 210, Darwin to Gladstone, 25 October 1877, ff. 305-308, H. Lloyd to Gladstone, 7 December 1877; 44458, ff. 202-203, 8 December 1878, Mivart to Gladstone.

<sup>85</sup> Bellemer, *Statesman and Ophthalmologist* pp. 31-32.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36; Hickerson, *Gladstone's Ethnolinguistics* p. 33.



of long hereditary development of the organs, he has achieved his present results, what would he have accomplished had he been possessed of the vast and varied opportunities of all kinds which we enjoy! And what have natural selection, and the survival of the fittest, with their free play through three thousand years, done for us, who at an immeasurable distance are limping after him, amidst the laughter, I sometimes fear, of the immortal gods?" In his preference for Goethe, for example, over Newton as a scientific authority, Gladstone's limited scientific credentials are revealed.

Partly, this was the result of his literary and philosophical championing of Homer as a transcendent, almost divine-like, genius.<sup>88</sup> Although Bellemer claims Gladstone was too well read and generally interested in science and evolution to ignore the contemporary and very controversial discussion of Darwinism (inconsistent and inexcusable given the scientific climate in the 1870s), it is important to point out that for Gladstone the intellectual, ultimately religious, significance of Homer was more germane to his mind than any examination of science *per se*. Thus his apologetic was less likely to succeed.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly in the scheme of human knowledge he subordinated the natural sciences due to his aversion for speculation and preference for probability. It is also an interesting example of the way he used scientific research in controversy or apology. It is also further evidence of development in a febrile, rather than a closed, system of thought. As Bellemer comments, "it is most useful as an indication of at least one of the many ways of investigating human evolution and its related theories facing the Victorian reader".<sup>90</sup>

When Gladstone came to discuss evolution in his *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*, he thus started from a position of long reflection and consideration. Chronologically and intellectually his views of the mid-1890s reveal the extent to which he had assimilated a doctrine of theistic evolution into his worldview, but, only in so far as this was bound up with, and supported, the notion of design. He enlarged on Butler's inductivist metaphysics, which had allowed the latter to see a providential teleology eliminating the element of chance in the natural world.<sup>91</sup> In 1895 Argyll had informed Gladstone, "It seems to me that the whole principle of what is now called 'organic evolution' is worked

<sup>87</sup> Gladstone, *Colour Sense*, pp. 371-2.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371. Gladstone notes Homer possessed "transcendent genius".

<sup>89</sup> Bellemer, *Statesman and Ophthalmologist*, pp. 28-29. On the topic of human evolution alone Gladstone read 55 different titles during the period 1859-1877.

<sup>90</sup> Bellemer, *Statesman and Ophthalmologist*, p. 34.

out in the last paragraph of Chapter IV of Butler's Analogy. And that is very remarkable. Butler intimates distinctly that 'special creation' was an idea only 'possibly' true to him, instead of being (as is commonly supposed) the orthodox doctrine". To fully understand this, and its implications, it is necessary to deal with it at some length.

Gladstone takes as given the argument of Butler that both natural theology and revelation provide probable, although not demonstrative, evidence that all secondary causes (i.e. natural laws) have an ultimately Divine first cause. The argument for and from design is saved from scientific detractors who argue that secondary causes are purely physical and solely materialistic in explanation.<sup>92</sup>

This appears to be an argument against scientists such as Ernst Haeckel whom Gladstone believed were using, or rather abusing, scientific theories such as Darwinism to extrapolate unwarranted conclusions about existence. In *The History of Creation*, Gladstone has marked his copy with a number of disparaging annotations where Haeckel uses natural selection to argue for a monistic explanation of existence, as had Graham in *The Creed of Science*. For example, Haeckel wrote "Natural Science teaches that matter is eternal and imperishable, for experience has never shown that even the smallest particle of matter has come into existence or passed away". This reveals once more that Gladstone had an aversion to pure empiricism and retained room for an idealist or, at least, other non-empiricist ideas. In the margin Gladstone has written against this, "this is most illogical, because experience has never shown it, it does not follow that it cannot pass away".<sup>93</sup> When Haeckel expounds a monist philosophy, Gladstone writes "all nonsense?"<sup>94</sup> He concludes by claiming Haeckel has overstated his case. In a marginal note Gladstone claims that as parents nurture their young and hence display altruistic morality, there are many other factors which account for the origin of life and intervene in the course of its development than Haeckel assumes on rather tendentious evidence.<sup>95</sup>

Returning to *Studies Subsidiary* we find Gladstone restating his linear, Lamarckian, conception of evolution. He argues that there is an infinite geometric set of antecedents to any particular event. If the initial cause of "the first combination or juxtaposition of

<sup>91</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 12 and p. 295. GP Add Mss 44106, ff. 308-10, 6 December 1895, Argyll to Gladstone.

<sup>92</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 296.

<sup>93</sup> Haeckel, *History of Creation*, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22. On p. 29 Haeckel had to concede that the basis of Darwinism was feeble in terms of demonstrative proof. Gladstone has written, "and this is science!"

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.



antecedents" has a Divine origin, the further one analyses secondary causes in nature the more securely a Divine foundation is deepened and strengthened. Furthermore,

Before proceeding to another stage, let me say that I do not proscribe the idea that even to the original and crude material forces before their differentiation, on account of the capacities for combination and result which, when differentiated, their constituent parts will exhibit, the argument of design might in a measure be applicable.<sup>96</sup>

This is a clue to a secularising trend in Gladstone's later thought.<sup>97</sup> Somewhat inconsistently, as argued below, Gladstone was to use intentionally secular-materialist notions, such as the nebular hypothesis of Laplace, as part of his defence of the Genesiac narratives as Divine revelation. He seemed unaware that this dividing up and 'compartmentalising' of knowledge was effectively conceding ground to a positivist way of doing science. Here Gladstone's antecedent presuppositions interfered with his method. This provides an additional clue to his epistemological preferences. Hence, despite his intentions, he is leaving explanations, if not purpose, to secular science. The result is to divorce the interior world of morality and spirit from knowledge; to form a separate, 'sacred', enclosure.<sup>98</sup>

"Passing onwards, then, we come to the case of man, the lord of the visible creation. And here, it seems to me, the argument of the teleologist rides triumphant, I may say almost unassailed, from the very first".<sup>99</sup> Not, however, as regards the adaptations that has produced the human body. For Gladstone readily admits that man's body is the result of the same series of sets of antecedent adaptations that have produced the inorganic and animal worlds. But, this cannot explain the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of man: "man finds himself placed not in a chaos of accidents, but what he finds on the whole, though only in partial and imperfect development, a *kosmos* of experiences and events so ordered as to present a certain character and to produce certain results"<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 296. On p. 298, Gladstone again appealed to the writings of Romanes referred to above as illustrative of the point he is trying to make.

<sup>97</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone. 1809-1898*, pp. 304-05. On the 'Bulgarian Horrors' and Midlothian campaigns, Matthew claims Gladstone had tacitly accepted secularisation in society by the 1870s. Religion became private and "discreetly personal", whereas moral unity and humanitarianism became politicised as the issue for the Liberal party to unite on and promote.

<sup>98</sup> T. Cosslett, *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>99</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 300.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

His final words on evolution shown him to remain a pre-Darwinian 'idealist' influenced thinker:

In itself it may be said to mean the sequence of events, but it really has reference to the order of causation. It might be said, as it is now used, to mean the sequence of events through the operation of second causes; but this language may not be agreeable to those who do not accept the suggestion it seems to make of a first cause lying behind them. The evolution we have now before us would perhaps in Christian terminology be called devolution, for it would mean that the Almighty has entrusted to that system of nature, which He has designed and put into action, the production and government of effects at large.<sup>101</sup>

In this way, Gladstone mistakenly seems to have believed that he has answered the challenge of Darwinian natural selection. However, Gladstone's viewpoint is based on Christian-idealist philosophy that had become rejected as a scientific explanation at the time, (the mid-1890s) by professional scientists. This suggests an imprudent participation, then, in public debate because it could lead critics to construe him as old-fashioned and out of his depth.

The more we have of system and fixity in nature, the better. For in the method of natural second causes, God as it were takes the map of His own counsels out of the recesses of His own idea and graciously lays it near our view; condescending as it were, to make us partakers of His thoughts, so that, seeing more and more of His qualities in His acts, we may, from knowing their large collocation, be more and more stirred to admiration, to thankfulness, and to love.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309. Bowler notes that between 1870 and 1890 the concept of Divine design and theistic evolution had "been banished from science by all except a few older men". It had been discredited within the scientific community. Even non-scientists like Aubrey Moore drew back from promoting the older Butler-Paley concept of design. "It seems to me that while evolution has broadened the basis and deepened the foundations of the design argument, we have recognised the fact that the superstructure has been too hastily run up, or at least much which we thought found in nature we really brought to nature from reason and conscience". GP Add Mss 44503, ff. 55-56, Moore to Gladstone, 19 February 1888. Bowler, *Eclipse of Darwinism*, pp. 27 and 54. See also, N. Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation*, (Chicago, 1979), pp. 83-85, on the redundancy of God as a 'scientific' causal explanation. F. M. Turner, 'The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: a



### The Gladstone Huxley Debate, 1885-1886.

The remainder of this chapter will explore some of the intellectual issues raised by the Gladstone-Huxley controversy of 1885-1886 and its aftermath. Themes have been chosen that reflect to best advantage the workings of Gladstone's mind when engaged in practical scientific controversy over Christian doctrine and Biblical inspiration. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Gladstone was one of the last major politicians and lay theologians to assert, in public debate, the veracity of Biblical truth as both scientifically and historically compatible and acceptable.

The first area concerned Gladstone's ability to reconcile, in general, the Mosaic Cosmogony with the latest scientific research. Here he ultimately failed despite 'Olympian' dialectics. The debate stemmed originally from a charge made by the French historian of religion, Albert Réville. He cited Gladstone as a believer in a doctrine of primitive revelation and then used the conflict between Genesis and science as proof against this and Divine inspiration.<sup>103</sup> It is crucial to remember that the character of the initial assault was as much theological as scientific.

From his first article in reply to this in November 1885, Gladstone devoted considerable space and effort to prove on probable evidence that the Mosaic Cosmogony could be reconciled with modern physical science. Thus, behind all the detailed posturing of Gladstone, the question of intellectual method was a key to the defence of revealed religion. He told Henry Wentworth Acland, the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, with whom he was corresponding at the time of the Huxley debate, that what he wanted was to 'make a Butlerian argument upon a general and probable correspondence' between the biblical text and present scientific knowledge.<sup>104</sup> Consequently in Gladstone's reply to Huxley's initial riposte, Gladstone argued for 'the most probable, and therefore the most rational' method of Butler against Huxley's agnostic scientism.<sup>105</sup> This would provide telling evidence for a primitive, divine, revelation amongst the earliest records of

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Professional Dimension', in G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain. Vol. IV, Interpretations*, (Manchester, 1988), 170-91, especially p. 181.

<sup>103</sup> *Prolegomena to the History of Religions. By Albert Réville. Translated from the French by A. S. Squire. With an Introduction by Professor F. Max Müller*, (London, 1884), pp. 41-42.

<sup>104</sup> Ms Acland d. 68. f. 70. Gladstone to Acland, 16 December 1885. See also diary, Vol. 1 July 1883 - December 1886, p. 448.

<sup>105</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, pp. 4, 6, 9, 16 and 18. [Reference to article in *The Nineteenth Century* Vol. XIX, No. CVII, (January 1886), not to the reprint in *Gleanings*].



scripture.<sup>106</sup> Despite huge efforts on his part, however, by the 1890s Gladstone was shifting his ground in his very assumptions. Thus, the hermeneutic key was

The object of the scientist is simply to state the facts of nature in the cosmogony as and so far as he can find them. The object of the Mosaic writer is broadly distinct; it is surely to convey moral and spiritual training.<sup>107</sup>

As it stands the Mosaic narrative conveys definite Divine truths in a way contemporaries of its author would have been able to comprehend. Gladstone claims these ideas are still capable of reconciliation with modern scientific research if the above “hermeneutic key” is taken into account, instead of relying solely on Butler’s method. This is notwithstanding the details of the narrative and accepting that its language included a certain amount of poetic or figurative elaboration.<sup>108</sup> That is, the Mosaic Cosmogony was written, primarily, to convey the spiritual message of divine revelation.

This is a partial retreat from his earlier position in which he sought to argue that the whole of the narrative had value, the mundane as well as the sacred content. He never gave up the latter point completely. Moreover Gladstone was keen to defend the details of Genesis 1-2:4. This can be observed in an editorial note in *Later Gleanings* (1898), upon his original creation article of 1885. He admits that as the article originally stood, it could not bear the weight of his conclusions (or withstand attack from critics such as Réville and Huxley). Despite this he claims the “force” of his argument remains unimpaired.<sup>109</sup>

It is precisely his insistence on detailed reconciliation that undermined his case as the degree of probability lessened as the greater exactness of correspondence was postulated. Therefore his reliance upon others for detailed, specific knowledge weakened his overall apologetic because the information provided was indefinite enough to warrant

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<sup>106</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation* and *Proem to Genesis*, passim; *Colonel Ingersoll*, pp. 491-93; *IR*, pp. 15, 25-27, 31-85, 215-44, 253, and 259-61; and *SPB*, pp. 360-63, 367-72 and 376-83.

<sup>107</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 48.

<sup>108</sup> Gladstone first outlined the specific idea of a ‘hermeneutic’ key to Genesis 1-2:4 in *Proem to Genesis*, pp. 8-9. The cosmogony was not intended to give scientific but moral instruction for those for whom it was written: “the natural and... highly moral purpose in conveying to their minds a lively sense of the wise and loving care with which the Almighty Father, who demanded much at their hands, had beforehand given them, in the provident adaptation of the world to be their dwelling place, and of the created orders for their use and rule”. Its language is, therefore, that of common, everyday usage. It is not scientific. It is to teach great moral lessons of wonder, gratitude and obedience.

<sup>109</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, editorial comment on this in *Later Gleanings*, p. 21.



different interpretations to those Gladstone chose to privilege. This was pointed out by several of his informal scientific advisers, especially Henry Wentworth Acland and the Duke of Argyll. Acland was very direct,

I have long thought that the Cosmogony of Genesis cannot have been intended as a scientific record. We are able only to apprehend such a document if we know what it is intended to convey. It is too general for comparison with the details of modern discovery. And some of the terms used are not certain in their sense, and so may be employed to unite different accounts. To compare therefore such a record with the records of modern geology is an uncertain and slippery task.<sup>110</sup>

Five years later, and still on the creation narratives in Genesis, he was advising, almost pleading with, Gladstone: "Keep out of the details. I have long ago said that one thing is certain in science, that the science of today will not be the science of tomorrow. I have no temptation therefore to make things square with its details".<sup>111</sup> To which Gladstone replied, "... I thank you very much for your letter which has caused me to think more on the course I have adopted. I do not quite see how to avoid detail, but what you say impresses me with the security of guarding myself".<sup>112</sup>

Much more devastating criticism, however, came from the pen of Samuel Rolls Driver, successor to E. B. Pusey as Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford. Privately, Huxley made much of Driver's 'demolition' of Gladstone.<sup>113</sup> The views of a sympathetic

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<sup>110</sup> GP Add Mss, 44091, f. 141, H. W. Acland to Gladstone, 13 December 1885. See also ff. 147-50, 16 December 1885; ff. 153-56, 21 November 1885; ff. 157-60, 22 December 1885; ff. 177-83, 20 March 1890; and ff. 184-87, 21 March 1890. See also the H. W. Acland correspondence in the Bodleian library, Oxford. Mss Acland d. 68, ff. 119-22, undated draft letter (13 December 1885); ff. 127-28, 13 December 1885; ff. 135-39, 17 March 1890; ff. 141-46, 20 March 1890; and ff. 147-50, 21 March 1890. These are copies of the originals sent to Gladstone. However, they contain material not deposited in the main Gladstone papers in the British Library. For the Duke of Argyll, see, for example, GP Add Mss 44103 f. 199, 29 December 1875, "Certain main authorities in the precursory of Genesis correspond marvellously with the latest science- but the fillings in seem to be clearly parable-tho' to what extent is hard to say". Also GP Add Mss 44106, ff. 60-63, 18 December 1885 and ff. 141-44, 12 August 1886.

<sup>111</sup> Mss Acland d. 68, f. 147 Acland to Gladstone, 17 March 1890.

<sup>112</sup> Mss Acland d. 68, f. 50 Gladstone to Acland, 19 March 1890.

<sup>113</sup> Huxley to Professor Poulton, (Hope Professor of Zoology at Oxford), 19 February 1886, "... Practically, Canon Driver, as a theologian and Hebrew scholar, gives up the physical truth of the Pentateuchal cosmogony altogether. All the more wonderful to me therefore, is the way in which he holds onto it embodying theological truth. So far as the question is concerned, on all points which can be tested, the Pentateuchal writer states that which is not true. What, therefore, is his authority on the matter-creation by a deity-which cannot be tested? What sort of 'inspiration' is that which leads to the promulgation of a fable as divine truth, which forces those who believe in that inspiration to hold on, like grim death, to the literal truth of the fable, which demoralises them for seeking in all sorts of sophistical shifts to bolster up the fable, and which is finally discredited and



Anglo-Catholic theologian could not be ignored, especially as his influence extended wider than Oxford and High Church Anglicans.<sup>114</sup> Publicly, in *The Expositor* of January 1886, he said of reconcilers in general: “read without prejudice or bias, the narrative of Genesis One creates an impression *at variance with facts revealed by science*: the effects of reconciliation which have been reviewed are different modes of obliterating its characteristic features, and of reading into it a *view which it does not express*”.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, he did conceive that Genesis and science could be reconciled on “the broader truths of physical fact”, as long as one did not aim for ideal harmony.<sup>116</sup> Privately, he was to reiterate this when advising Gladstone on his ‘creation’ articles in *Good Words* magazine: “I should be the last to desire to interpret the Bible with pedantic likedness, but the reconcilers seem to me to take licenses of interpretation beyond what is reasonably and fairly admissible”.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, belief in Butlerian probability did not always strengthen Gladstone’s tendency to generalise in debates over technical points, such as this one on scientific language in relation to *Genesis*. This failure can also be seen in Gladstone’s later difficulty with Huxley over the Gadarene swine.

Part of the problem lay in the scientific authorities Gladstone used to bolster his case. Initially he leant heavily on the French scientist Baron Cuvier who had died in 1832. He also used the works of Sir John Herschel, the early Victorian astronomer. Even in the 1890s he was relying for support on William Whewells’s 1834 Bridgewater treatise, *Astronomy and General Physics*.<sup>118</sup> Professional, secular, scientists such as Huxley were scornful of Gladstone’s ‘modern’ authorities. Taunting Gladstone on relying on Cuvier as

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repudiated when that fable is finally proved to be a fable? If Satan had wished to devise the best means of discrediting ‘Revelation’ he could not have done better.” Quoted in Huxley, L, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, (London, 1900), Vol. II, p. 118.

<sup>114</sup> On Driver see, F. M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, (New Haven, 1981), p. 151 and P. Addinall, *Philosophy and Biblical Interpretation. A Study in Nineteenth Century Conflict*, (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 210-13.

<sup>115</sup> S. R. Driver, ‘The Cosmogony of Genesis’, *The Expositor*, Third Series, Vol. III, (January 1886,) 23-45, p. 37. Also “Everyone who has read the article in question will admire the eloquence, and appreciate the breadth and justice of view [of this illustrious statesman], by which in general it is characterised; but its special constructive parts, if examined, will be seen to be open to the same objections which are alluded to it in the text [of his article]”. This was written by Driver before the controversy had begun.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>117</sup> GP Add Mss 44509, ff. 114-15, Driver to Gladstone, 2 February 1890.

<sup>118</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, p. 33 and *IR*, p. 226. See also, J. Garnett, ‘Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain’, in C. Cunliffe, (ed.), *Joseph Butler’s Moral and Religious Thought*, 63-96. Especially pp. 75-78 on Gladstone’s use of the Bridgewater Treatises in his *SSB*. Garnett says Gladstone used these “without any hint that they might not vindicate his case in the light of subsequent developments in natural science”, p. 76.



an authority, Huxley wrote, "the palaeontology of our day is related to that of his, very much as the geography of the Sixteenth Century is related to that of the Fourteenth".<sup>119</sup>

Moreover, to such professional scientists, the Duke of Argyll was regarded as a conservative amateur.<sup>120</sup> Of Gladstone's other modern advisor, Sir Richard Owen, it has been written, "a new generation of natural scientists were writing a revised history (of Victorian science) in which his was a smaller and smaller role. Much of what he had done, much of what had seemed so important, so central to science, had become, as he seemed to have become, irrelevant".<sup>121</sup> Eventually Gladstone dropped Owen vexed at his lack of vigilance in proof reading his work on reconciliation, which led to his public embarrassment at the hands of Huxley.<sup>122</sup>

Even Owen himself recognised the futility of reconciling Genesis and science and in a letter of October 1885, wrote equivocally of how science and the Mosaic Cosmogony both conflicted but could still possibly support reconciliation.<sup>123</sup> On a scrap of paper preserved in the Glynne-Gladstone collection at St. Deiniol's library is the palpable relief of Gladstone at the thought of receiving support from an eminent and respected American geologist. Gladstone has exclaimed: "Professor Dana's deliverance"! His letters of support on general reconciliation were duly despatched as postscripts to his articles in the *Nineteenth Century*.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> T. H. Huxley, 'The Interpretation of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXVII, (December, 1885), 849-60, p. 851.

<sup>120</sup> On Argyll's diminishing scientific reputation in the 1880s and 1890s see Gillespie, *Charles Darwin and the Problem of Creation*, pp. 93-103 and Bowler, *Eclipse of Darwinism*, pp. 27, 44 and 49-50.

<sup>121</sup> J. W. Gruber and J. Thackray, *Richard Owen Commemoration. Three Studies*, (London, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>122</sup> See, for example, GP Add Mss 44250 f. 236, Gladstone to Manning, 9 January 1886. "Having found my scientific teacher for the first article had not been sufficiently vigilant, I have taken other measures for the second, and have little fear of any formidable attack from that quarter". He is referring to Acland and Argyll as his new scientific teachers.

<sup>123</sup> Gruber and Thackray, *Richard Owen*, p. 77. See GP Add Mss 44492, ff. 205-12, Owen to Gladstone, 2 October 1885.

<sup>124</sup> GGP 1631. Undated bundle, circa June-July 1886. The letter appears in the August edition of the *Nineteenth Century*, dated 11 July 1886, p. 304. See Diary Vol. 11 *loc cit.*, p. 589, where Gladstone notes writing to the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*. Earlier Gladstone had written a postscript to the article *Proem to Genesis* that appeared in the January issue, p. 176. He appeals to an article written by Professor James Dwight Dana in the April 1885 issue of the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. XLII, No. 166. Apparently George F. Wright sent this after Gladstone's first article in November 1885 (GGP 718, 15 January 1886). It too is preserved and annotated in GGP 1632, in a different location from the other Dana bundle. Dana was Silliman Professor of Geology at Yale College (later University). His article is a favourable review of a reconciliationist book by Arnold Guyot, Professor of Geology and Physical Geography at New Jersey College, *Creation, or the Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science*, (New York, 1884). Gladstone's diary records him reading Guyot on 7 February 1886. But he must have read this earlier or been familiar with its arguments for him to add his postscript in the January issue of the *Nineteenth Century*. His sense of apparent satisfaction at besting Huxley is plain: "It is a relief to find that the burden of this (i.e. Gladstone's)



The correspondence of the Oxford linguist Friederich Max Müller shows how damaging all this could be to Gladstone's reputation. Müller regarded theories of primeval revelation as "a figment of scholastic theologians, which falls to pieces as soon as they try to grasp and define it".<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the Mosaic Cosmogony was simply "the highest expression that could be given by the Jews at that early time to the conception of the beginning of the world we have. We have learnt, certainly since Kant, that the knowledge of beginnings is denied to us- that all we can do is grope back a little, and then to trust".<sup>126</sup> Although these remarks were sent privately to the Duke of Argyll, they illustrate a scientific episteme inimical to Gladstone.

Of Gladstone's Genesis articles, however, Müller wrote to Huxley a most revealing portrait of Gladstone<sup>127</sup>:

My feelings about Gladstone are very mixed. Politically I take him to be one of the very few honest and unselfish men left. He is high minded and the tone of his mind has kept the level of political morality higher than it would otherwise have been in England... With regard to philosophical questions I find him quite ready to listen, till you touch certain problems which are more or less connected with religion, and then it seems to me that certain parts of his brain are petrified, hard as rock, so that both facts and arguments, or any other kind of dynamite, are perfectly harmless or useless. I suppose as we grow old we are more or less liable to that slow process of the ossification of the brain.<sup>128</sup>

Such opinions as this led Huxley to characterise Gladstone as a modern-day Sisyphus.<sup>129</sup> This must have rankled Gladstone given his belief that a philosopher should be free and concerned only for the truth. In terms of defending Divine revelation, this has

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argument is shared with witnesses, who are competent and unsuspected on the scientific side; and will not be liable to a repetition *mutatis mutandis* of an old objection: 'This people, which knoweth the law, is accursed' - John, 7:49". In his reply, Huxley remained unconvinced of these new authorities. In stating that he has the highest respect for them, he insinuates that Gladstone has misused their arguments to suit his own purpose. Dana's arguments cannot be interpreted in the way Gladstone claims: "If he will get them to sign a joint memorial to the effect that our present paleontological evidence proved that birds appeared before the 'land population' of terrestrial reptiles, I should regard it my duty to reconsider my position - but not till then". Huxley, 'Mr Gladstone and Genesis', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XIX, (February 1886), 191-205, p. 192.

<sup>125</sup> Max Müller Papers, Mss Eng. d. 2347, Bodleian Library, Oxford, f. 17, Müller to Argyll, 29 January 1875.

<sup>126</sup> Max Müller Papers Mss Eng. d. 2347, f. 21, Müller to Argyll, 4 February 1875.

<sup>127</sup> Müller wrote the introduction to Réville's book and played a small part in the ensuing controversy.

<sup>128</sup> Huxley Papers, Imperial College Library, XXIII, 120, 3145, Müller to Huxley, 6 November 1885.

<sup>129</sup> Huxley, *Interpretation*, p. 857.



led one historian of the nineteenth century science versus religion debates to argue for reconciliation as a counsel of despair.<sup>130</sup> In one respect, however, Gladstone was intellectually more subtle and honest than his opponents, at least in his assumptions. He accepted the spiritual validity of all the text of the Genesiac narratives. On the other hand, for example, Driver selected only what he already believed to be the spiritual truth of the text. The remainder of the narratives were ignored as practically worthless.<sup>131</sup>

In examining the order of creation given in Genesis 1, it is easy to perceive Gladstone's difficulty. This can be divided into two parts: first, inorganic creation, second, organic creation. This section will focus on the second, as chronologically (1880s), Gladstone emphasised this as of primary concern. He dealt with inorganic creation only after (particularly in the 1890s) he had satisfied himself on the organic.

In *The Dawn of Creation* Gladstone charts what he calls a grand fourfold division of life, set forth in orderly succession in the stages of organic development:

1. Water population
2. Air population
3. Land population- animals
4. Land population-man

He then comments, "Now, this same fourfold order is understood to have been so affirmed in our time by natural science, that it may be taken as a demonstrated conclusion and established fact".<sup>132</sup> However, this is where Gladstone's earlier reliance on Owen as a proofreader failed and vitiated his apologetic purpose. Gladstone, having relied on Owen, took this to be, incorrectly, a striking and telling modern scientific vindication for primitive Divine revelation amongst the earliest records of scripture.

Responding to criticism by Huxley<sup>133</sup> that this supposed vindication was false, Gladstone changed his succession in *Proem to Genesis* from a fourfold to a fivefold order.

<sup>130</sup> Addinall, *Philosophy and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 196.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213; Driver, *Cosmogony of Genesis*, pp. 41-45.

<sup>132</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, p. 21. In the original draft Gladstone had written that the grand fourfold succession is found in the book of Genesis. This becomes merely "set forth" in Genesis. A slight concession. GP Add Mss 44794, ff. 118-60; f. 139.

<sup>133</sup> Huxley, *Interpretation*, pp. 852-58.

He also took the opportunity to tighten up his phraseology, which both he and his critics agreed lacked precision.<sup>134</sup> The new order is, as follows:

Gladstone	Huxley
1. plants	1. birds
2. fishes	2. amphibia, reptiles?
3. birds	3. fishes
4. mammals	4. flying insects, scorpions
5. man	5. not given-presumably higher animals, man. <sup>135</sup>

Gladstone claimed this was the legible and valid conclusion of the latest scientific research into the origins of life on earth.<sup>136</sup> Huxley again pointed out that Gladstone was wrong. Huxley argued that the order of categories three and four ought to be reversed and chided Gladstone on the place of, or rather the lack of, reptiles and whales in his scheme. These were both fatal points for Gladstone.<sup>137</sup> Yet he never abandoned his second taxonomy; in fact, he vigorously defended it.<sup>138</sup> However, a modern scientist has agreed with Huxley. This was the overwhelming view of biological opinion in the 1880s. Even James Knowles, editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, privately admitted this to Huxley. Whilst relishing this controversy of titans he advised Huxley to soften his claws in mauling Gladstone.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>134</sup> For example, see Argyll references below, e.g. GP Add Mss 44, 106 ff. 45-49, 9 December 1885. Also 44250, ff. 225-26, Gladstone to Manning, 27 December 1885, "I must plead guilty to the use of loose phraseology, which escaped the attention of a very distinguished morphologist [Owen] so that I assumed it to be all right. I have now amended it and get the positive approvals of two strong geologists", i.e. Etheridge and Phillips.

<sup>135</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, p. 13; Huxley, *Interpreters*, pp. 852-53.

<sup>136</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, pp. 10-16.

<sup>137</sup> Huxley, *Gladstone and Genesis*, pp. 193-97. See also, GP Add Mss 44106, ff. 56-59, Argyll to Gladstone, 15 December 1885 and 44493, ff. 188-89, Owen to Gladstone, 7 December 1885.

<sup>138</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 60-75.

<sup>139</sup> Huxley, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II, p. 117; D. Adrian, *Huxley. Evolution's High Priest*, (London, 1999), pp. 162-64; C. Bibby, *Scientist Extraordinary. The Life and Scientific Work of Thomas Henry Huxley, 1825-1895*, (Oxford, 1972), pp. 122-24. HP XX, 51, 02486, Knowles to Huxley, 16 December 1885, XX 52, 02487, 31 December 1885, XX 53, 02488, 1 January 1886, XX 55, 02489, 6 January 1886, XX 56, 02490, 13 January 1886, XX 60, 02492, 5 February 1886 and XX 61, 02493, 1 February 1886. For generally negative reviews kept by Gladstone see GGP 1628, *The Nonconformist and Independent*, (January 1886), pp. 4-5, *The Secular Review*, 21, (November 1885), pp. 523-24; GGP 1630, *The Freethinker*, Vol. III, no. 19, 6 May, 1888, Vol. III, No. 20, 13 May 1888; and Vol. III, No. 25, 8 July 1888. Also undated reviews by Samuel Laing for the *Agnostic Annual*; *Birmingham Daily Mail*, 31 December 1885; GGP 1649, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 January 1886, pp. 5-6; and three articles by John Robertson in *The National Reformer*, 8, 15 and 22 November 1885.



In attempting to deal with such an obvious discrepancy in the Mosaic record concerning reptiles, Gladstone's primary theological presupposition becomes apparent, in what in reality was a technical point of geology and biology. Here he betrays his reliance on knowledge gained second hand and from partial sources. In this he cavilled and used a tortuous and unconvincing argument. The fact that the Mosaic writer refers to reptiles as contemporaneous with mammals is, he argues, part of the author's didactic strategy. Without comment, Gladstone switches to using the Septuagint version of Genesis 1 instead of the revised version he has previously used. To Gladstone the answer is simply that, according to the moral lesson the author wished to convey, the role of reptiles is of secondary importance in the order of creation. Additionally, Gladstone used the weak argument that reptiles, being reprehensible and obnoxious creatures, are only fit to skulk the earth. They are, thus, of no consequence to the author.<sup>140</sup> This weakness is highlighted by Stephen Jay Gould who re-emphasises the crucial role of the serpent as tempter in the Garden of Eden.<sup>141</sup>

Gladstone claimed that reptiles were treated in a "loose manner" by the author of Genesis. As if aware of the brittleness of such special pleading he then concedes that while the place of reptiles in the order of creation does not invalidate his argument, neither can it be used in its defence. "However this case may be regarded, of course, I cannot draw to it any support for my general conclusion". Gladstone in the draft has crossed out his reason for passing over Genesis' loose treatment of plants and invertebrate animal life, birds and reptiles. This is further proof that even from his original conception, birds and reptiles are discussed on account of the aims of the Mosaic writer and not their place in organic evolution. "The reptiles fill a great place in the rocks, a secondary one in Genesis". A rather question begging remark.<sup>142</sup>

This was because he restricted himself by the sources used to construct the four- and fivefold succession. He had been engaged in lengthy correspondence with Argyll and Owen on this very point. In addition, he had relied too heavily on their subject specific knowledge as objective. Letters were exchanged especially on the place of birds

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<sup>140</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, p. 14.

<sup>141</sup> Gould, *Genesis and Geology*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, Gladstone *Proem to Genesis*, pp. 13-14. See the original draft of this article, GP Add Mss 44794, ff. 162-208, f. 189. See also, GP Add Mss, 44504, ff. 190-91, Laing to Gladstone, August 17 1888.



and reptiles in the order of life.<sup>143</sup> Owen and Acland appear to have been the first to suggest that Gladstone consult the works of Etheridge and Phillips<sup>144</sup>, and Acland, an advance proof copy of Professor Joseph Prestwich's new volume on geology.<sup>145</sup> These, together with Owen's *Palaeontology*<sup>146</sup> and, later, James Dwight Dana's *Bibliotheca Sacra*<sup>147</sup> article were Gladstone's chief scientific buttress.<sup>148</sup> Upon examination, however, these sources were either too outdated to be of scientific weight, or they lent themselves to the opposite interpretation to that given by Gladstone.<sup>149</sup>

Initially, Gladstone appealed to Owen's table of genera in his *Palaeontology* in correspondence and the first article.<sup>150</sup> He only named Owen in the second article. However, the Duke of Argyll advised Gladstone not to depend upon this as a scientific authority since it was outdated and superseded by subsequent research. Argyll referred Gladstone to Robert Sterridge, a palaeontologist at the Natural History museum, as a safer modern guide. He even pointed out that Owen's table invalidated the statesman's argument, as did the recent discovery of the Silurian scorpion.<sup>151</sup> Owen himself wrote to Gladstone agreeing with him that the 'water population' was prior in origin, but that his

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<sup>143</sup> Argyll : GP Add Mss 44106 ff. 32-37, 6 December 1885 on scorpions and reptiles; f. 38, 9 December 1885, ff. 45-49, 9 December 1885, on scorpions, reptiles, Owen's table and Sterridge; ff. 50-51, 11 December 1885 on birds; ff. 52-55, 11 December 1885 on Owen's table, birds, reptiles, scorpions and amphibia; ff. 56-59, 15 December 1885, ff. 60-63, 18 December 1885 on whales, Sterridge and birds; and ff. 75-76, 21 December 1885. Owen : GP Add Mss 44492 ff. 205-12, 21 October 1885 on Cuvier, Whewell, Herschell; ff. 217-20, Gladstone to Owen, 23 October 1885; ff. 236-37, 25 October 1885; 44493 ff. 188-89, 7 December 1885 on Phillips' Manual, scorpions and birds; ff. 199-200, 9 December 1885, on the 'water population'; f. 214, Gladstone to Owen, December 11 1885, on birds; and ff. 223-24, 14 December 1885 on birds.

<sup>144</sup> Phillips, *Manual of Geology*, Vol. II, by R. Etheridge. New edition, 1885. Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, p. 59.

<sup>145</sup> Proof copy of pages 80-81 quoted in *Proem to Genesis*, p. 61.

<sup>146</sup> R. Owen, *Palaeontology, or a Systematic Summary of Extinct Animals and their Geological Relations*, (London, 1861), Second edition, p. 5. Quoted in *Proem to Genesis*, p. 59.

<sup>147</sup> J. D. Dana, 'Creation, or the Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science', *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. LII, no. 166, (April 1885), 201-224.

<sup>148</sup> Mss Acland d. 68 ff. 70-71, Gladstone to Acland, 16 December 1885 and ff. 74-75, Gladstone to Acland, 11 December 1885. Gladstone originally sought Acland's help due to the visit of his brother, Thomas Dyke Acland, to Hawarden. Thomas advised Gladstone that his brother might be of some help to him. See Mss Acland d. 68, T. D. Acland to H. W. Acland, 11 December 1885, incomplete. "I am having a very interesting visit... he is going to write again on Genesis. He says he has a little to complain of Prof. Owen to whom (for courtesy) he sent a proof... but (Owen) never pointed out the errors in the order of created things which G. admitted Huxley has spotted (a small point). I advised him to send his next proof to you; I said you were careful... had access to knowledge - There is something about footprints of birds in some book..."

<sup>149</sup> See note 143 containing letters to and from Argyll and Owen. Mss Acland d. 68, f. 176, Prestwich to Acland, 16 December 1885, "All of Mr Gladstone's arguments have been used over and over again 1/2 a century ago..."

<sup>150</sup> Owen, *Palaeontology*, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> GP Add Mss 44106 ff. 45-49, 9 December 1885 and ff. 52-55, 11 December 1885.



use of it was tendentious. "But if polemic puts the proposition in terms of 'water population' as a whole - meaning it to be understood as including existing forms, such as whales, porpoises etc... he makes it admissible to deny that it appeared before 'air' and 'land' populations".<sup>152</sup> He also noticed the early evidence of scorpions to suggest a very early date for the start of wholly terrestrial life.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, Owen informed Gladstone there was no unequivocal evidence of birds appearing before definite mammalian remains. Either way, "no negative inference affecting Avian remains at an earlier period is of much value".<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, Gladstone quickly and sheepishly abandoned talk about 'populations'. It is puzzling to understand why Gladstone adopted these terms in the first place and allowed them to reach publication. Argyll had repeatedly warned him of their lack of precision. "The danger of the proposition you put forward lay in classifying animals by habitat - water, air, land which is artificial as regards structure and descent probably".<sup>155</sup> Owen, probably unwittingly, undermined Gladstone's case when he commented, in January 1886 on the *Mosaic Cosmogony*, that it "illustrates... recognisable phenomena as were intelligible to the age it addressed, as they will be to the non-scientific and the wage classes of all time".<sup>156</sup>

By then the damage had been inflicted. Gladstone's appeal to Etheridge and Phillips and Prestwich, although more useful to his case, carried much less weight due to his previous loose phraseology.<sup>157</sup> Gladstone's much valued appeal to Dana's article in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* did not substantiate his second table. Dana was unable to definitively place birds in his schema. Gladstone's relief was that he had not placed them as early as Huxley. Nevertheless, Dana hints that birds may be roughly equal to mammals in chronological evolution, perhaps even posterior. Either way, "the existence of birds before the earliest mammals is not proved though believed by some contemporary palaeontologists on probable evidence".<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> GP Add Mss 44493, f. 188, Owen to Gladstone, 7 December 1885.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 189.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> GP Add Mss 44106 f. 55, Argyll to Gladstone, 11 December 1885. See also, ff. 32-37, 6 December 1885, and ff. 45-49, 1 December 1885.

<sup>156</sup> GP Add Mss 44485 f. 34, Owen to Gladstone, 5 January 1886. This is misdated in the correspondence to 1884.

<sup>157</sup> See Huxley, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II, p. 117.

<sup>158</sup> Dana, *Creation*, p. 223.

Huxley then argued with some justification that Gladstone had misrepresented his authorities.<sup>159</sup> The pressures of party politics and the campaign for Home Rule prevented Gladstone from taking the debate further until after retirement. The arguments, however, reappeared in the letters columns of *The Times* six years later in a series called 'The Bible and Modern Criticism'. It involved amongst others, Argyll and Huxley. In a rehash of the same arguments, Gladstone's creation articles were mentioned several times. Nowhere does Gladstone make reference to this later debate, nor was Gladstone involved in the 1892 exchange of views.<sup>160</sup>

Stephen Jay Gould has argued that Gladstone misconceived the metaphor of the Genesis story on a fundamental level:

I do feel that when read simply for its underlying metaphor, the story of Genesis 1 does contradict Gladstone's fundamental premise. Gladstone's effort rests upon the notion that Genesis 1 is a tale about *addition* and linear sequence... I think that its essential theme rests upon a different metaphor - *differentiation* rather than accretion. God creates a chaotic and formless totality at first, and then proceeds to make divisions within it, to precipitate islands of stability and growing complexity from the vast, encompassing potential of an initial state.<sup>161</sup>

Given that Gladstone had a linear and sequential view of theistic evolution, there is much truth in this thesis. However, on at least one occasion, Gladstone did directly note that Genesis 1 could be read as a story of differentiation. This is in his annotation of Haeckel's *History of Creation*, read, according to his diary, twice, once in 1882 and once in 1891.<sup>162</sup> His annotation could come from either or both, but it is revealing:

"Two great fundamental ideas, common to the non-miraculous theory of development, meet us in this Mosaic hypothesis of Creation, with surprising clearness and simplicity- the idea of separation or *differentiation* and the idea of *progressive development*, or *perfecting*."<sup>163</sup>

Clearly, as in his understanding of biological evolution, he found the idea of progressive development more satisfactory in his understanding of the operations of the Divine mind, steeped as he was in the design argument and the natural teleology of Butler.

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<sup>159</sup> Huxley, *Gladstone and Genesis*, p. 18.

<sup>160</sup> See, *The Times*, 23, 26 January, 1, 3, 4, 8, and 11 February 1892.

<sup>161</sup> Gould, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 18.

<sup>162</sup> 25 May 1882 and 13 December 1891.

<sup>163</sup> Haeckel, *History of Creation*, p. 38.



One of the original charges of Réville's *Prolegomena to the History of Religions* had been on the Genesiac account of inorganic development: the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars and the firmament.<sup>164</sup> Réville cited all this as proof against revelation to humanity. It was also an example of degeneration in scripture, since Hebraic monotheism was written into the creation account at a later date. In his copy Gladstone has marked his disagreement with this. Interestingly he writes 'ma' that God gave a primitive revelation to humanity.<sup>165</sup> This is because Gladstone saw modern man as Adamic and that the original revelation of creation entrusted to Adam passed via Noah's descendents to Moses or the Mosaic writer. Hence Gladstone believed in the historicity of the fall, Eden, the deluge, etc... Here Gladstone is at his most conservative in the defence of the Biblical text.<sup>166</sup>

Gladstone had to respond to the argument that since Genesis deals with creation anterior to man, that is Adamic man, it could not have been witnessed. He admits that the account is partly poetic and not strictly scientific. But "to speak of it as guesswork would be irrational. There were no materials for guessing. There was no purpose to be served by guessing". The Proem is, in fact, an historical recital: it deals with, or was intended by its author to be taken to deal with, matters of fact.<sup>167</sup> To Gladstone an argument from solid facts and inferential logic was one of great importance. Since the data it contains was inaccessible before the creation of man and is impossible to obtain by any human agency, then,

it can only be a communication from the Most High; a communication to man for the use of man, therefore in a form adapted to his mind and to his use. If, thus, considered, it is true, then it carries stamped upon it the proof of a Divine revelation; an assertion which cannot commonly be sustained from the nature of the contents as to this or that minute portion of scripture.<sup>168</sup>

This does not, naturally, preclude "the possibility that casual imperfections may have crept into the record". Its moral or spiritual truth remained unimpaired. It was that

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<sup>164</sup> Réville, *Prolegomena to the History of Religions*, p. 42.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>166</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation, Proem to Genesis, IR, passim*. Also, in the *WJB, II, Analogy*, where Gladstone accepts Butler's chronology of creation having taken place five or six thousand years before Butler's generation. This is also the chronology of his Homeric studies.

<sup>167</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

which could be understood "by the mind of man in a comparatively untrained and infant state".<sup>169</sup>

Thus, the importance to Gladstone of the nebular hypothesis to explain Genesis 1:1-19.<sup>170</sup> This hypothesis assumed an increasing importance in his apologetic. In his original *Dawn of Creation* article he made only a slight reference to this theory, but used the name of the hypothesis' most famous advocate, Laplace, as a scientific authority in his argument for reconciliation.<sup>171</sup> In the original draft of the article he has crossed out a section on the nebular or rotatory hypothesis as proof of reconciliation.<sup>172</sup> In his final article, this appears under the slightly different guise "as the most probable method through which our solar system has taken its form".<sup>173</sup> It was a scientific validation of Genesis 1:1-2, the formless and desolate void of the initial stage of creation.

Already reliant on Whewell's Bridgewater treatise as one of great weight, Gladstone later claimed,

The hypothesis may not indeed have reached the point of demonstration, and this the subject matter itself may not be found to permit; yet it has attained to so much authority from consent that Dr. Whewell, were he writing now, would not have had simply to hand it over to the future for consideration, but would probably have declared that it holds the field, and seems little likely to be displaced from it.<sup>174</sup>

Gladstone's acceptance of the nebular hypothesis as scientifically the most probable way the solar system developed exposed his scientific shortcoming at one of its weakest points. This is effectively summarised by Huxley:

Now it appears to me that the scientific investigator is wholly incompetent to say anything at all about the first origins of the

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>170</sup> Pierre-Simon, Marquis de Laplace. Born, 1749, died, 1827. Mathematician, Astronomer and Physicist. The nebular hypothesis was first outlined by Laplace in His *Exposition de Système du Monde* in 1796. Essentially, it is the theory that the solar system evolved or developed from prior nebulous matter due to its own internal forces and reaction. See, C. C. Gillespie, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Vol. XV, Supplement 1, (1964), pp. 341-45 and R. L. Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law. Laplace's Nebular Hypothesis in American Thought*, (Seattle, 1977), pp. vii-viii.

<sup>171</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, p. 23.

<sup>172</sup> GP Add Mss 44794, ff. 128-29.

<sup>173</sup> Gladstone, *Dawn of Creation*, p. 23.

<sup>174</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 227. In *Dawn of Creation*, pp. 23-24, Gladstone refers to Robert Chambers' (anonymously published) *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, (London, 1844) as support for the hypothesis. Also to his 'favourite', Etheridge's edition of Phillips' *Manual of Geology*, on pp. 10-11 of *Proem to Genesis*.



material universe. The whole power of his organon vanishes when he has to step beyond the chain of natural causes and effects. No form of the nebular hypothesis I know of is necessarily connected with any view of the origination of the nebular substance.<sup>175</sup>

That is, the nebular hypothesis alone cannot, does not need to, postulate God as the creator of the nebulous matter. Moreover, argues Huxley, if one saw Genesis 1:1-2 as a primordial chaos, then it cannot be supported or reconciled by the hypothesis, because nothing in nature is utterly devoid of law and order.<sup>176</sup>

Once again this shows Gladstone's theistic, a priori, reasoning, in spite of his theoretical aversion to this. It is also inconsistent and contradictory for him to use an avowedly materialistic, if not atheistic, scientific theory to bolster support for Divine revelation. Laplace's entire motivation had been to "eliminate teleological considerations from physical explanation. If he could show that order in the system had derived simply from the operation of physical laws, references to purpose and contrivance could be excluded".<sup>177</sup> Although Laplace had eliminated chance in nature and to this extent was compatible with natural theology, God was unnecessary as a causal agent.<sup>178</sup>

Unfortunately there is no major study of the impact of Laplace or the nebular hypothesis on British theology in the nineteenth century. In a monograph by Ronald Numbers on the impact of Laplace in nineteenth-century American thought, it is argued that such an assimilation and reinterpretation of the nebular hypothesis into biblical theology was failing by the 1890s.<sup>179</sup> He argues that from the 1850s the British scientists Whewell, Daniel Brewster and John Herschel were losing faith in the hypothesis as a scientific explanation.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, that the hypothesis was used by atheists to further their cause.<sup>181</sup> Gladstone, like the Americans Arnold Guyot and Dana, could accommodate the hypothesis only within a philosophical and theological framework that allowed the prior assumption of a Divine creator.<sup>182</sup> This was a naïve assumption for Gladstone to pass off as science. Therefore it, ironically, helped to undermine the spiritual authority of Genesis by linking it to the fortunes of an unproven and naturalistic theory.

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<sup>175</sup> Huxley, *Gladstone and Genesis*, p. 202. See p. 8 of Haeckel's *History of Creation*.

<sup>176</sup> Huxley, *Gladstone and Genesis*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>177</sup> J. H. Brooke, *Science and Religion. Some Historical Perspectives*, (Cambridge, 1991), p. 238.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239; Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, p. 11. Laplace told Napoleon, in his presence, God was unnecessary to explain his hypothesis.

<sup>179</sup> Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, p. viii.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Yet, Gladstone needed the nebular hypothesis to explain one crucial discrepancy in the Genesis-Science debate. That is, the creation of sunlight and the nature of the Mosaic 'days' of creation. This came out well in his correspondence with Acland. In preparation for a revision of his Genesis articles for a more popular treatment, he wrote to Acland in March 1890,

There is a point of physics on which I mean to inform myself and perhaps you will tell me what would be your answer. Given two spherical bodies of the same high temperature and the same materials, one small, the other large, say as 1:100, which would cool first? I suppose that under the nebular theory the present relative temperatures of the sun and earth shows us that when the system was a making, the earth cooled before the sun - was smallness one of the causes?<sup>183</sup>

Gladstone received replies from Acland and the chemist Sir Henry Roscoe to his satisfaction that the earth would have cooled first.<sup>184</sup> Acland advised that this was of no real significance in the argument that light existed, capable of helping vegetation to grow, before the formation of the sun:

I read and re-read the account of the third and fourth days, trying to see how one might accept 'light' as one thing and the making of a Sun a subsequent thing. But I could not on any scientific conception I could form, do this. Be sure Pritchard [Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford] who has all the data at his finger's ends, would do so if he could. So he invents an explanation, which in some form would occur to any poet- but would not satisfy any scientist, as a scientific explanation of known facts.<sup>185</sup>

Significantly Gladstone does not use Pritchard's solution to the problem of vegetation before the sun, or the term 'day' before the origin of days and seasons. Pritchard had postulated a change in the inclination of the earth's axis from nearly perpendicular to the present elliptic angle of  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ , as a necessary consequence of its once nebulous condition. This occurred in obedience to Divine command on the fourth day. The earth's surface now cleared of gaseous and cloudy obstruction to receive the solar

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<sup>183</sup> Mss Acland d. 68 f. 79, Gladstone to Acland, 10 March 1890.

<sup>184</sup> See GP Add Mss 44509, f. 70. The diary does not record when, or if, Gladstone elicited such information from Roscoe by correspondence.

<sup>185</sup> Mss Acland d. 68 f. 142, copy, Acland to Gladstone, 20 March 1890. Original at GP Add Mss 44091, f. 178.



light created on the first day. Perhaps Gladstone did not use this theory because at the time it was regarded as scientifically heterodox.<sup>186</sup>

Instead, he developed a point first discussed in *Dawn of Creation*. The sun, moon and stars were not created on the fourth day, but, from a human perspective, assigned to their right place in the solar system. Even before the definite fixedness of the sun, as light concentrated there would have been enough diffuse light resultant from the Divine act in verse 1 to enable the survival and growth of vegetation. This was given that the other prerequisites, soil, atmosphere and water, existed.<sup>187</sup>

In answer to critics, such as Driver, Huxley and Réville<sup>188</sup>, that the vegetation just discussed is not preparatory or initial but herbs, trees, fruit and grasses, that is, the food of mammals and man, Gladstone had a clever argument. He claimed that it is reasonable to suppose that less evolved forms of vegetable life developed into food suitable for the first mammals to subsist upon. Since the aim of the Mosaic writer was intelligibility, at the same time as he writes of the inception of vegetable life on the fourth day, he forecloses discussion. "Although in order of time the beginning only, and not the completion, belongs to the epoch at which he introduces it". Here is a master dialectician at work.<sup>189</sup>

All of this led Gladstone to accept the standard conservative interpretation of the 'days' of Genesis as not solar days or even extended geological periods, but more properly as "chapters in the history of creation".<sup>190</sup> The best-understood and most concrete vehicle to convey such a progression of chapters to the original audience was 'day' used figuratively and not literally. Gladstone had used almost the same sense of the term 'day' as conservative reconcilers, such as Guyot and Heinrich Reusch.<sup>191</sup> In his last public

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<sup>186</sup> C. Pritchard, *Occasional Thoughts of an Astronomer on Nature and Revelation*, (London, 1889), pp. 188-90. On heterodoxy, see, for example, W. Graham, *The Creed of Science. Moral and Social*, (London, 1881), xvi.

<sup>187</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>188</sup> See above references. Réville, 'Dawn of Creation: An Answer to Mr Gladstone', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XIX, (January 1886), pp. 160-175.

<sup>189</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 69-71.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52 and *SPB*, pp. 382-83.

<sup>191</sup> A. Guyot, *Creation or the Biblical Cosmogony*, p. 20 and p. 27. He treats the Cosmogonic days as organic phases or great periods in the history of the universe and of the earth alone. On p. 53 he proclaims the "great 'phases of creation'" Gladstone read Reusch twice, the first in the original German and in translation. Gladstone annotated both copies chapters 1-4. References are given from the English translation. On p. 20 Reusch refers to "the six days or six periods of creation" F. H. Reusch, *Bibel und Natur. Vorlesungen über die Mosaische Urgeschichte und ihr Berhältniss zu dem Ergebnissen der Naturforschung*, (Bonn, 1876), Eduard Weber Verlag=Buchhandlung. *Nature and The Bible: Lectures on the Mosaic History of Creation and its Relation to Natural Science. By Dr. F. H. Reusch. Revised and Corrected by the Author. Translated from the Fourth edition by Kathleen Lyttleton*, (Edinburgh, 1886). J. A. Zahm, *The Bible, Science and Faith*, (Baltimore, 1894).



writing on creation, Gladstone used another conservative theologian, J. A. Zahm. Zahm argued in chapters two to four of his work on reconciliation that from the very first, primitive Christian literature held different interpretations on the chronological length of these 'creative days' and were legitimately entitled to without censure. The Christian Church had never proclaimed *de fide* that these days were of twenty-four hours duration.<sup>192</sup>

### Conclusion.

What is one to make of Gladstone's engagement with natural science in relation to Christian theology?

It is an excellent example of his apologetical method at work revealing its strengths and weaknesses. There is much truth found in the comment of one of Huxley's correspondents on Gladstone's creation articles, that scientifically and theologically this was the mind of 1820's clerical Oxford in dealing with science.<sup>193</sup> However, this needs to be balanced with the realisation that by the end of his life Gladstone did accept a progressive, theistic form of evolution, even if this was not a full acceptance of Darwinian natural selection. This was because evolution enhanced the idea of the argument from design. The American Calvinist Asa Gray makes this forcefully in a book that Gladstone described, both in his diary and in public, as 'very remarkable'<sup>194</sup>. Gray contended that the theory of evolution (post-Darwin) corresponded very well with the design argument of Leibnitz, Malebranche, and SS. Augustine and Aquinas.<sup>195</sup> Characteristically, for Gladstone, evolution or this 'darling of the age', an hypothesis which to his eye seemed in method 'rather too much like a steeplechase' had the Book of Genesis for its parent, and the support of St. Paul, Eusebius and St. Augustine.<sup>196</sup>

This leads on to the question of scientific method. Here, one must qualify Morley's negative conclusion on Gladstone and science that opened this chapter. Although not a scientific authority, nor an amateur scientist in the mould of Lord Salisbury, for example, neither was Gladstone an unenlightened obscurantist when he came to deal with the

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<sup>192</sup> Gladstone, *SPB*, p.382.

<sup>193</sup> HP XII 19, 00369, Henry Campbell to Huxley, 12 August 1894. Refers to Gladstone's general reputation of sophistry and the mind of Oxford University in 1829.

<sup>194</sup> A. Gray, *Natural Science and Religion*, (New York, 1880). See *Proem to Genesis*, (article) p. 18 and diary for 20/12/85, Vol. 11, p. 455.

<sup>195</sup> Gray, *Natural Science and Religion*, p. 83.



intellectual underpinning of science. Gladstone did not object *per se* to science and its methods, but to what he labelled 'scientism'. That is, he rejected the positivistic methodological imposition of some scientists, such as Huxley, into the realm of theology, philosophy and ethics.

This was based upon Gladstone's rejection of empiricism alone as the prince of epistemology. He countered this with reliance upon Butlerian probability that reinforced the distinction, in his mind, between the differing levels of knowledge available to both layman and scientist. Behind this lay a preference for idealism over positivism, and idealism refracted through Butler. The entire debate over the Mosaic Cosmogony was one of "working beyond that of mere human faculties in the composition of Scripture, is essentially one for the disciples of Bishop Butler; a question, not of demonstrative, but of probable evidence".<sup>197</sup>

That is why Gladstone repeatedly attacked Huxley's method in his defence of revelation. Huxley went beyond his own scientific expertise to proceed upon the whole, treating science and religion alike with the methodological certainty of mathematics and the legal terminology of the bar. Moreover, Huxley, unchivalrously, was unnecessarily provocative, used exaggeration and ignored appropriate authorities. Huxley was wrong to think he could arrogate to science theories 'susceptible to clear intellectual comprehension'. He treated theology with 'an affectation of contempt' because all extra-scientific knowledge was founded upon 'imagination and ignorance'.<sup>198</sup> Huxley's positivistic approach to knowledge was just as much an impediment to the search for truth, in Gladstone's opinion, as Fitzjames Stephen's legalism and Green's secularised idealism was. None of these could form the true basis of a national clerisy.

Thus, at points, Gladstone's apologetic bore positive results. However in the exchange with Huxley and, in his reliance upon probability, Gladstone came out of the fight the worst. Gladstone's argument for the reconciliation of the Mosaic Cosmogony with modern science on the grounds of probability floundered when he moved from the generalities to the particularities. As one of his scientific advisers stated to Gladstone, 'keep out of the details'.<sup>199</sup> Acland rightly pointed out that these should be left to future research. In relying upon second hand data, the technicalities of which he could not verify at first hand, Gladstone revealed himself unwise to write publicly on this subject.

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<sup>196</sup> Gladstone, *SPB* p. 351, *Proem to Genesis*, (article) p. 17, *Dawn of Creation*, p. 38.

<sup>197</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, (article) p. 16.

<sup>198</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, (article) pp. 2, 3, 4, 5, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

Consequently, because Gladstone applied the method of probability in a manner not conducive to exhibiting its best results, he appeared to contemporaries as outdated and conservative in his defence of Genesis. Thus Samuel Laing, writing in *The Fortnightly Review*, castigated Gladstone as “eloquent, rhetorical, diffuse; anything, in short, except logical and closely reasoned...a man who is ecclesiastically minded and Homerically minded”.<sup>200</sup> The main conclusion, therefore, is that the debate on the Mosaic Cosmogony revealed Gladstone as most exposed in the application of his general method, because it was less suited, and less developed in his mind, to areas of knowledge in which he possessed little in the way of empathy and technical expertise.

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<sup>199</sup> MS Acland d. 68. f. 147, H. W. Acland to Gladstone, 17 March 1890.

<sup>200</sup> Samuel Laing, ‘Mr. Gladstone as a Theologian’, *The Fortnightly Review*, XLV, (January 1886), p. 83.



## CHAPTER SIX.      INSPIRATION, HIGHER CRITICISM AND THE PENTATEUCH.

### Introduction.

In the midst of combating Huxley over Genesis and science, Gladstone commented,

So far as I am aware, there is no definition, properly so called, of revelation either contained in Scripture or established by the general and permanent consent of Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Huxley could not use the idea, so indeterminate and variable, in any polemical sense. Gladstone, as this comment shows, realised the difficulties posed by the higher criticism of the Bible, especially the problems of inspiration and the recording of the Text. Gladstone did not deny a human input into the sacred text.<sup>2</sup> He went on to argue, "(i)t is [in] the guidance, and not necessarily or uniformly in the consciousness of the writer, that, according to my poor conception the idea of revelation mainly lies".<sup>3</sup> Gladstone placed his belief on the probability of the moral truths in revelation that "ought irrefragably *pro tanto* to command assent and govern practice".<sup>4</sup> In his reading for the defence of the Mosaic Cosmogony, Gladstone came across authors whom he respected, such as Asa Gray, who saw no difficulty in recognising that Divine revelation itself was a process of evolution.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, the attempt by Gladstone to defend or, more accurately, strengthen the idea of a supernatural, divine revelation did not end with his articles on the cosmogony of Genesis. From the late 1880s Gladstone undertook an extended analysis of the idea of divine inspiration as the basis of the Biblical revelation against the

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<sup>1</sup> Gladstone, *Proem to Genesis*, p. 15 [of the article, not the reprint in *Gleanings*].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Gray, *Natural Science and Religion*, pp. 107-108.

challenge of the historical-critical method of Bible study. Like many of his contemporaries he concentrated his defence on the idea of inspiration with regard to the Old Testament. It was in this part of scripture that historical study and critical methods had the most profound theological and philosophical impact. The modern theologian Bernard Longeran, commenting on this wrote, "(t)heology was a deductive, and it has largely become an empirical science...Where before the step from premises to conclusions was brief, simple and certain, today the steps from data to interpretation are long, arduous, and, at best, probable"<sup>6</sup>

### Inspiration.

Although the main thrust of Gladstone's response came in the 1890s he had long been aware of the threat posed by critics of divine inspiration. Two early memoranda demonstrate this. In 1859, Gladstone wrote:

It is perilous indeed to take the figures of Holy Scripture which are adaptations and reductions of truth and using them for the whole truth to make known the foundations of dogma and to build upon them a system, especially, that system, which needs, because a system, become exclusive.<sup>7</sup>

Four years later he penned the following:

1. Is the *word* infallible?
2. Does its infallibility extend to all it contains?
3. Is there any test by which to separate with absolute certainty what is within the limits of infallibility from what is beyond it?
4. Is this test of immediate and visible operation?
5. By whom can it be applied?<sup>8</sup>

In order to place Gladstone's answers within the larger historical context, it is important to remember that there is no authoritative, fixed or orthodox doctrine of biblical inspiration supplied by the Bible or the Churches and, given the challenge of biblical criticism to the very idea of inspiration, there are only three possible responses. Firstly, to abandon the concept of inspiration completely. Secondly, to adopt a conservative, word-centred idea of inspiration. This is a pre-enlightenment attempt to reconcile the results of modern science and biblical scholarship by arguing that this does not preclude

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<sup>6</sup> D. R. Law, *Inspiration*, (London and New York, 2001), p. 8

<sup>7</sup> GP Add Mss 44748, f. 128. Memorandum on Theology by Gladstone dated 9 October 1859.

<sup>8</sup> GP Add Mss 44752, f. 319. Memorandum on Theology by Gladstone dated 7 August 1863.



the idea that revelation is mediated by the words of scripture in a way that cannot be divorced from its verbal expression. Thirdly, there are liberal or non-verbal theories of inspiration. Here inspiration is located not in language as such but in the biblical message or process of composition, where inspiration is situated in the religious and moral contents of the Bible and the text is a vehicle of communication for such truths. Philosophically, the conservative method is deductive, the liberal, inductive.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand how Gladstone stands in relation to this historical perspective, it is necessary to briefly outline the kinds of responses proffered in the late Victorian period and identify precisely what questions Gladstone sought to answer. A brief, useful discussion of the varieties of views on inspiration in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that Gladstone had to contend with was set out by the American Baptist writer Basil Manly, in his 1888 work, *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration. Explained and Vindicated*. These are:

1. Mechanical inspirations or dictation.
2. Partial inspiration-inspiration limited to certain parts of scripture, e.g. doctrinal teachings, the naturally unknowable.
3. Graduated inspiration-all scripture is inspired, but some parts more fully than others. There is human error.
4. Natural inspiration-no supernatural intervention. Inspiration is merely a heightened spiritual state, possessed by all, e.g. Abraham Kuenen, F. W. Newman.
5. Universal Christian inspiration. Inspiration due to personal, inner influence of the Holy Spirit, e.g. F. Schleiermacher, and many German theologians, S. T. Coleridge, and Thomas Arnold.
6. Plenary inspiration-full inspiration of every part of the Bible that has divine authority and is infallibly true.<sup>10</sup>

Given this context, and the theoretical framework, it is intended to analyse Gladstone's thought on inspiration in the following terms. In his introduction to *Sheppard's Pictorial Bible*, 1895, Gladstone asked, "Is there, or is there not, one great and spiritual revelation of the will of God to mankind, vital to the welfare of the human race?"<sup>11</sup> He then goes on to argue in the affirmative and that this is "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture". As late as December 1897 Gladstone was in private consoling himself,

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<sup>9</sup> Law, *Inspiration*, pp.41-46.

<sup>10</sup> *The Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration. Explained and Vindicated by Basil Manly D.D. LL.D, Professor in Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, (New York, 1888), pp. 45-56.*

<sup>11</sup> Gladstone, *SPB*, p. 352.

These were the grand cardinal features of the condition of mankind in which the Hebrew race was distinguished, in a vital manner from the rest of mankind,

1. the doctrine of creation
2. the doctrine of sin
3. the belief and practice of monotheism

All these were the divine property of the Hebrew race. Did they not themselves, in their isolated grandeur, establish the fact of a primitive and continuing revelation? Did they not apart from the Sacred books, oral traditions, records of miracles, and the rest, establish the broad and deep foundations which were required to sustain the sublime fabric of Christian religion?<sup>12</sup>

Implicit in this statement is the belief in some form of divine inspiration underlining such a marked revelation. The first part of this chapter seeks to analyse Gladstone's views on this by combining his published and unpublished writings into a coherent theory. In particular, it draws upon a series of previously overlooked but fascinating memoranda composed by Gladstone at various points throughout the 1890s.<sup>13</sup> These provide far more explicit detail of the considered aspects of Gladstone on inspiration than a survey of his published writings alone would reveal.

A study of all Gladstone's major writings specifically devoted to the idea of inspiration shows he started from, or at least had to acknowledge, the following premises: given that the inquirer has neither the assistance nor the restraint of any absolute or objective formula of inspiration sanctioned by either the Bible or the undivided Church, the principal components of any reasonable or defensible idea of inspiration must embrace arguments over truth and error and the recording of such in the text of scripture and the mind of man.<sup>14</sup> Behind these are questions of whether or not there are any grounds of antecedent certainty that lead the inquirer to discover or determine the nature of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. Are there any *a priori* considerations as to the degree and extent of inspiration that are neither deducible from the assertions of scripture itself nor from the information and analysis presented by

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<sup>12</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, f. 190. Memorandum by Gladstone on Old Testament dated 13 December 1897.

<sup>13</sup> These are: GP Add Mss 44773 ff. 189-94, Memorandum on Biblical Exaggeration, 13 July 1890; 44776, ff. 116-24, Memorandum on Holy Scripture (Inspiration), 1894; ff. 124-32 on Inspiration, 1894; 44793, ff. 234-39. Undated but contemporaneous memorandum on Jahvez-Name of God (due to type of paper and handwriting evidence); ff. 254-58 undated memorandum on revelation (looks contemporary with previous); ff. 259-62 undated memorandum on revelation and language, possibly a continuation of the preceding; 44794, ff. 94-95, undated (1890s?) memorandum on scripture; and ff. 263-65 memorandum on Bible, 1893.

<sup>14</sup> GP Add Mss, 44793, f. 254, memorandum on revelation.



scripture?<sup>15</sup> How did Gladstone answer these questions? In addition, in the context of late Victorian theologies how original and convincing were these?

He begins with a frank admission of the contemporary state of apologetics,

So far as regards the Holy Scriptures, it appears that we have had to undergo a serious displacement of ideas, involving a certain shock to the intellectual and moral nature. Such a displacement is not wholly without precedent in the history of Christianity. It may not improperly be compared with the revolution brought about by the Copernican system in our conceptions of the material universe.<sup>16</sup>

In modern terminology, Gladstone admits that historical and critical study of the Bible has led to a 'paradigm shift' in our interpretation of the nature and degree of inspiration. "Is it then the fact that in the inspired books themselves the divine afflatus, so gloriously governing their general tenor, is at particular points marked with the exceptional opinion of human infirmity?"<sup>17</sup>

This can be accepted by analogy with God's other dispensations to humanity: the books of nature and providence and the history of the Jewish and Christian Churches. In all of these divine authority and guidance have been intermixed with palpable human error, far more obvious and transparent than anything found in the Old Testament. In this respect the sixteenth century Reformation was both a benefit and a weakness. "To our inevitable advantage (of our own country, for example), the Bible advanced from the second rank to the first among the instruments of spiritual guidance: but along with this...there came signs of a spirit of exaggeration, which aimed at making it what it was not"<sup>18</sup> That is, apologists for divine inspiration had insisted such inspiration was plenary and infallible. The infallibility of the Pope had been replaced by an overemphasis on the text of scripture.

Unsurprisingly, this was a "disastrous preparation when a spirit of critical inquiry was to be awakened, believers in the Bible were silently unawares committed to defending it with weapons unfit for the service".<sup>19</sup> Using a medieval form of Christian Aristotelianism, the problem was that some defenders of divine inspiration had exaggerated and distorted its accidental or outward form, thus laying open to criticism

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<sup>15</sup> *The Nature and Extent of Divine Inspiration, As Stated by the Writers and Deduced From the Facts of the New Testament.* Rev. C. A. Row, MA, (London, 1864), pp. 3-6.

<sup>16</sup> GP Add Mss 44773, f. 189, memorandum on Biblical exaggeration.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 191.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 191.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 192.

the vital substantial or essential elements of the said inspiration.<sup>20</sup> This was because they followed infallibilist tendencies in Roman Catholicism which led to a corruption of the Aristotelian method.

A key to the resolution of such hyperbole and the beginning of a rational and convincing argument for divine inspiration was provided by "our great and profound writer who had prophetically applied to the questions of the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture, and had provided for the defenders that breadth of space which prevented the freedom of movement indispensable for the effective prosecution of their work". Gladstone stresses, once again, the merit of thought which is essentially free in the search for truth, and is not limited, or bound, by the restrictive practices of profession or pursuit (see chapter two). The writer is one of Gladstone's four mentors, Bishop Butler.<sup>21</sup> Such an argument, however, indicates at least an implicit, even if largely unconscious, acceptance of critical thinking and methodology.

In a section of *Studies Subsidiary to Bishop Butler*, Gladstone's adoption of Butler's argument is most clearly presented.<sup>22</sup> Using Butler, Gladstone gives a list of reasons for rejecting what he calls "verbal inspiration of the Bible" and which corresponds to Manly's description of mechanical and plenary inspiration.<sup>23</sup> It is unnecessary to examine these in detail as the important, positive, aspect of the argument follows immediately afterwards. That is, verbal inspiration would greatly flatter, like Vaticanism, the indolence of human nature. "If any development of divine revelation be acknowledged, if any distinction of authority between different portions of the text be allowed then, in order to deal with subjects so vast and difficult, we are at once compelled to assume a large liberty as will enable us to meet all the consequences which follow from abandoning the theory of a purely verbal inspiration".<sup>24</sup>

Essentially the Butler-Gladstone argument is as follows: the one overriding and antecedent characteristic of the natural world is that the evidence given to us is not mathematically precise or easy to gather. We need observation and watchfulness and must not read the will of God from one or two particular facts or experiences of life. Although we can clearly discern the general rules of divine government and disclosure, these are neither absolute nor uniform. This corresponds with what we perceive of all

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 191.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 192-93. A reference to Butler's *Analogy*, Part Two, Chapter 7.

<sup>22</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, pp. 16-21. Section entitled, 'On the Application of Butler's Method to the Holy Bible'.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. See also Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Gladstone, *SSB*, p. 16.



other divine works and dispensations. In a technical sense these are not complete or formal but fragmentary, occasional and unfinished. Divine inspiration is no different from these other methods of communication. As God's methods are not unqualified but variously conditioned, as far as inspiration is concerned we can only urge "that this rule of supply for us, in faculty, in knowledge, in the adjustment of life, and all besides, is not one of perfection, but sufficiency"<sup>25</sup>

For Gladstone this argument was neither original nor fresh. Almost thirty years earlier he had made the same point in an incomplete draft letter to John William Colenso, then Bishop of Natal. Gladstone wrote, "... if there be such a thing as revealed religion; since the revelation, if any, is now past, and we with no other than ordinary means, sit as judges in a sense upon those who by the hypothesis had in certain cases extraordinary communication. Also it seems reasonable (apart from texts) to suppose that the guidance of the Almighty, if assumed *sufficiently* (italics mine) to the individual, is assured eminently to the race"<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, this is an excellent use of what Agatha Ramm has described as his doctrines of adaptation and approximation (see Chapter Two).<sup>27</sup> These were the fruits of Gladstone's first engagement with Aristotle and Butler in the 1830s. Since men are fallible and because of sin always liable to error, perfect knowledge in the human mind is impossible. There is only ever an approximation to such perfection. At this point in the reasoning process probability took over.<sup>28</sup> Adaptation meant that the essential character of inspiration, for example, could be preserved whilst ideas relating to its inessential form could be discarded or modified to reflect changing circumstances.<sup>29</sup> It is easy to place in this interpretation the thesis that inspiration is merely that of sufficiency.

How did Gladstone work out his theory in details and can it be said to be coherent?

The need for a revelation, hence an inspiration, is due to the fallen and sinful nature of humanity. Unaided it can find no remedy as all of Gladstone's Homeric

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>26</sup> GP Add Mss 44415, ff. 348-49, 10 August 1868. Gladstone to John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal. Incomplete draft. F. 350 ff. contains a much shortened draft letter that summarised the preceding.

<sup>27</sup> A. Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', *Historical Journal*, 28, 2, (1985), 327-40. See also Ramm, *William Ewart Gladstone*, pp. 9 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Ramm, 'Gladstone's Religion', pp. 330-31.  
*Ibid.*, pp. 333-34.

studies repeatedly emphasised.<sup>30</sup> What then can be offered as sufficient evidence of the reality of inspiration? “Obviously we cannot postulate that it should be complete *ab initio* or at any other given time. For it then might be in excess of the limited capacity of the receivers, and the eye may according to Milton be ‘Dark with the excess of light’”<sup>31</sup> Thus is avoided the tendency of the human mind to stray into speculation. Yet this does not mean that inspiration is free from error, and this, because it must be refracted through the mind of man and then expressed in language that is not fully capable of expressing thought.<sup>32</sup>

This was a favourite argument of Gladstone (as seen throughout this thesis). As early as November 1846 he was writing on the connection between divine revelation and human language. Such language is an imperfect vehicle for thought. Gladstone postulated that God might have overcome this through inspiration in the same way the divine government of the world is conducted, through impure agencies. Thus, inspiration is to be found suffused generally in Scripture taken as a whole, rather than any particular passage or portion of it. It is a universal law bequeathed by God that the human mind could not grasp truth entire, and all at once. Particular passages of scripture might only contain partial aspects of revealed truth. Inspiration is not uniform and for that reason private interpretation of Scripture ought to be circumscribed by acknowledgement of the manner of Scripture’s genesis.<sup>33</sup>

In another private memorandum Gladstone wrote:

Revelation is divine knowledge conveyed to the mind of the human being with the palpable marks of divinity upon it. It is stamped like a royal coin for circulation that it may be known as soon as its seen. It is thus fitted for a special use, namely to become the common property and common law of men.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Gladstone, *Studies in Homer and the Homeric Age*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-8, 21-70, Vol. 2, pp. 1-46, 165-67 and 521-23; *Address on the Place of Ancient Greece in the Providential Order of the World. Delivered Before the University of Edinburgh on the Third of November 1865*, (London, 1865); *Juventus Mundi*, pp. 1-30, 174-75, 200-211, 267-70, 288-89, 330-31, 370-71 and 374-77; *Homeric Synchronism: an Enquiry into the Time and Place of Homer*, (London, 1876), pp. 7-32, 72-73 and 87-88; *Homer*, (London, 1878), pp. 1-46, 65, 68-70, 73, 82, 88 and 90-91; *Landmarks of Homeric Study. Together with an Essay on the Point of Contact Between the Assyrian Tablets and the Homeric Texts*, (London, 1890), pp. 1-89.

<sup>31</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, f. 255. Undated (1890s) memorandum on revelation.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 255.

<sup>33</sup> GP Add Mss 44736, f. 25 ‘Th’, 4 November 1846.

<sup>34</sup> GP Add Mss 44736, ff. 219-20. Undated memorandum. It could be c. 1861 as f. 211 is dated October 17 1861.



This is not proof against a supernatural inspiration, as it is in accordance with what we reasonably believe to be the aims and guidance of God. The outward form of such an inspiration may yet be imperfect and contain error, yet it is illogical to exact a particularity and precision in the forms of scriptural writing that is not demanded of literature generally.<sup>35</sup> This is another swipe at the arrogance of a certain form of liberal, secular intellectual. "Hardly any written composition is to be elaborately circumspect as to exclude every possible misapprehension, and it is to be feared that in the endeavour to obtain the degree of rigour it would become stark, unnatural and unfit for the purposes of familiar intention towards which both testaments are so marvellously addressed".<sup>36</sup> It is therefore eminently reasonable to assume the degree of inspiration (given its defining characteristic is of sufficiency only) to delineate the distinction between sacred and profane documents. Furthermore, it is equally reasonable to argue that knowledge contained in such an inspiration/revelation is far above learning ordinarily acquired.<sup>37</sup>

Even in scripture these assertions are common, in the books of Moses, for instance, which distinguish between material that is said to be inspired by God and material that is not. A good example of this kind of reasoning is St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (8:12.25). "He shows us when it is that he speaks not under direct inspiration and therefore leaves us the necessity to conclude that in his ordinary writings when he makes no such distinction he claims divine authority for his utterances".<sup>38</sup>

This is exactly the same point, using the same references to 1 Corinthians, that Gladstone had penned earlier, probably around 1861.<sup>39</sup> In both cases what St. Paul says on his own account is clearly distinguished from what he claims is inspired revelation. In the earlier 1861(?) memorandum Gladstone remarked on how the books of the New Testament that did not find their way into the canon until many generations after their authors had died were like other works that Christians still remained undecided upon. The answer is that Almighty God may have transmitted thought as well as feelings incapable of full comprehension by our weak and disordered minds and beyond all

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<sup>35</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, f. 255. Undated (1890s) memorandum on revelation.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 256.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 256-57.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 257.

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 34.

reach of language. "But we are at once struck with the fact that the place which belongs to the Holy Bible in the Christian system raises a philosophical problem of peculiar condition".<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, what of the Pentateuch, for example, the Mosaic legislation in Leviticus that purports to be inspired?

If I am told that such sentences with what follows them were in many cases deliberately interpolated, I cannot escape from such a conclusion that such preaching would destroy so far as it went the claim not only to inspiration but also to care, and not only to inspiration and to care, but also to good faith. It must of course be admitted that everything was open to the incidental errors of transmission; that the modern writing of languages need not have falsified the substance; that supernatural development and addition might conceivably have been introduced in furtherance of the main idea. But either the nucleus or the central heart of these passages actually belong to Moses; or they were written in the full undoubting belief that the things following the preface [and the Lord spake to Moses] had been delivered to Moses; or they were useless inventions to further the particular views of another writer and a later age. Under the first two suppositions we still have our Bible. Under the third I cannot escape from the impression that a heavy blow has been struck not only at the authenticity, but at the honesty of the text.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, inspiration, even if sufficient and not perfect, would still remain subject to all the laws and foibles of the process of ordinary transmission and recording of information and ideas. Inspiration is not transmigrated or transmogrified from divine inception to human expression in such a way as to guarantee infallibility.<sup>42</sup> The human recording of inspiration is produced under the same laws of composition as any other literary product and this has not always been borne in mind by recent apologists according to Gladstone. "Let it not herein be suggested that such an observation tends to destroy their trustworthiness. There is something in it like the reflection of luminous rays when passing from medium to medium. It may be said that in the transfusion something may be lost, something may be transfigured. It is not for us with our weak and closely bounded faculties to take upon us to determine, that the action of a revelation itself requires that the revelation should be perfect".<sup>43</sup> This is the student of

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 271.

<sup>41</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, f. 258. Undated (1890s) memorandum on revelation.

<sup>42</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, ff. 258-59. Undated (1890s) memorandum on revelation and language.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 259.



Butler versus Fitzjames Stephen and Huxley. It is also a possible reason why Gladstone was not overly concerned with *Essays and Reviews*. In fact he accepted its basic conclusion that Scripture must be interpreted by the ordinary rules of academic criticism.

One needs to acknowledge the difficulty in expressing the contents of inspiration in language that is of its nature highly figurative. Yet the idea of figure or relativity is no part of the thought processes of the mind in dealing with pure comprehension. In order for inspiration to be expressed as revelation the receiver-cum-recorder

Must find some common measure, some free and open channel of assured passage between the uttering and the receiving mind. But there are phrases though abstractly nearer to the truth, are not nearer but further from the comprehension of those addressed, and therefore, as the truth has become subjective in their minds, and has to be recovered by its power over thought and life, they are in this practical sense not nearer to, but further from, the truth itself.<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding, for the purposes of recording and analysing inspiration/revelation, such figurative language may convey a truer knowledge of the divine than any amount of philosophical enquiry concerning the nature and scope of communication with the Absolute, i.e. God.<sup>45</sup> Again this shows Gladstone's division of knowledge into an hierarchy, with the impossibility of fact-objective knowledge. Again, these ideas were not new to Gladstone. Writing to Archibald Campbell Tait, then Bishop of London, in 1864 over the Privy Council judgement on two authors from the collection *Essays and Reviews*, he comments: "I do not believe it is in the power of human language to bind the understanding and conscience of man with any theological obligation, which the mode of argument used and the principles assumed would effectually unloose".<sup>46</sup> John Keble was corresponding with Gladstone at the same time on this very issue. It is clear, therefore, that Gladstone's memoranda of the 1890s were mature views rather than original contributions. Questions of overall originality are dealt with below.<sup>47</sup>

Much of the above was incorporated into Gladstone's most sustained polemic for the nature and content of divine inspiration, as laid out in the pages of *The Impregnable*

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 260.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 261.

<sup>46</sup> GP Add Mss 44330, f. 30. 26 April 1864. Gladstone to A. C. Tait, Bishop of London, copy. Original in the Tait Papers, Lambeth Mss. Tait 81, ff. 190 v - 96 a.

<sup>47</sup> GP Add Mss 44402, ff. 217-22, 27 March 1864, John Keble to Gladstone.

*Rock of Holy Scripture*.<sup>48</sup> The first chapter is essentially a popular presentation of the above argument and, as such, does not advance it. Instead attention is given here to the veracity and historicity of the Pentateuch (as shown below). The same comments are valid for his arguments in his *General Introduction to Sheppard's Pictorial Bible*.<sup>49</sup> To avoid repetition and to move the analysis forward, Gladstone's remaining manuscript memoranda are crucial.

Historians of Gladstone's later religious thought have overlooked the extent to which he adopted a virtually 'Liberal-Catholic' rather than a High Anglican viewpoint in two vital memoranda, both entitled 'inspiration' and both written in 1894.<sup>50</sup>

The first point to notice is Gladstone's open admission that too mechanical or artificial a concept of inspiration means "that there are actions made the subject of commendation in Scripture which we cannot bring into harmony with our conceptions of the moral law. It is a difficulty as I conceive of rare occurrence".<sup>51</sup> For the present Gladstone abjures as to whether this is simply due to error in our present version of scripture, and this was absent in the original recording by inspiration.

Then comes a crucial admission with important consequences:

The term suffusion is perhaps happily chosen to express the full possession and command with which the inspiring action from above enters into the mind of the person inspired when its reception is genial and honest. But it can do nothing towards explaining the nature of the operation itself. And in such large and important classes it seems hardly applicable, there [in such important cases of Biblical record,] precisely where the office of the sacred writer was that of the chronicler of historical events, or the collector and editor of ancient traditions. I imagine that few suppose the creation story to have drawn its origins from Moses. Indeed since the discovery of the Assyrian tablets<sup>52</sup> such a supposition has become wholly inadmissible. Moses is apparently to be regarded as a guarantor and deliverer, but first of all as a collector and selector of traditions: and the inspiration available for such a work would seem to be in the nature of guidance vouchsafed to the judgement.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 6-8, 10-12, 37-38, 85-89, 100, 126, 150 and 171.

<sup>49</sup> Gladstone, *SPB*, pp. 352-90, 361, 388 and 397 ff.

<sup>50</sup> See note 13.

<sup>51</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, f. 117, Memorandum on Holy Spirit, inspiration 1894.

<sup>52</sup> Gladstone makes much the same argument in his studies on the Mosaic Cosmogony. For this see the articles *Dawn of Creation* and *Proem to Genesis* and the Chapter 'On the Recent Corroboration of Scripture from the Regions of History and Natural Science', in *IR*, pp. 221-25 and 229-40; and *SPB*, especially pp. 371-78. Gladstone uses the same evidence to bolster his thesis on the historicity and veracity of the Homeric Poems. See *Landmarks of Homeric Study*, pp. 127-60.

<sup>53</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, f. 124, memorandum on Holy Spirit, inspiration 1894.



However, only three years earlier Gladstone had been unwilling to concede foreign ideas behind the Hebrew notions of immortality in public debate with T. K. Cheyne. Therefore, this was not a complete acceptance of biblical criticism by Gladstone, but one that was cautious and judicious. Whilst at Oxford in early 1890 Gladstone, busy writing his Old Testament articles for *Good Words*, sought out the guidance of several critics. He read Gore's "masterly paper" from *Lux Mundi* and recorded two days later in his diary, "Driver: long conversation on Genesis 1. Etc..." Over the next few days his diary records reading on biblical criticism, and further meetings with S. R. Driver, H. P. Liddon and Cheyne. This shows Gladstone was anxious to consult the latest scholarly opinion despite his reservations on the ultimate worth of critical studies.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of the fact that Gladstone refuses to dogmatise or define precisely the mode in which the process of the human mind is inducted into divine knowledge<sup>55</sup> and truth, he is, in fact, arguing for two points of view that can be viewed as essential to a liberal, non-verbal concept of inspiration.<sup>56</sup> However reluctantly Gladstone may or may not have come to this conclusion and however he may qualify it, it is undeniable that he argues for a form of graduated or non-uniform inspiration of the scriptural writers/redactors. This firmly locates Gladstone in the sphere of influence of such Liberal-Catholics as Johann Ignaz von Döllinger, Johann Adam Möhler and Charles Gore.<sup>57</sup> This was also in sympathy with other younger Anglo-Catholic theologians such as J. B. Mozley, J. R. Illingworth and others of the *Lux Mundi* group and less in the spirit of the older High Church position on inspiration, exemplified in theologians such as Pusey and Henry Parry Liddon.

There is also a clear influence of the period's preoccupation with evolutionary thinking in Gladstone's argument. For at this point he makes explicit reference to the idea that tracing the higher (i.e. spiritual) evolution of man is a superlative work of

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<sup>54</sup> Diary entries for 31 January and 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 February 1890. H. W. Morris, *Work Days of God; or, Science and the Bible* (London, 1888). Read 4 February 1890. In the diary is the comment '(notable)'. H. P. Liddon, *The Worth of the Old Testament*, (London, 1890) read February 9 1890.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 124-25

<sup>56</sup> *Law, Inspiration*, pp. 43-46 and 100-108.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-108; J. T. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration Since 1810*, (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 18-21, 32-34 and 175-80 on Möhler, Döllinger and Acton respectively.

Christian philosophy.<sup>58</sup> Further, “to one of its most important departments Mr Palmer has addressed himself with abundant intellectual capacity and with earnestness, reverence, and courage, in the newly published volume entitled *The Development of Revelation*”.<sup>59</sup>

This book, still preserved at St. Deiniol’s library, is very heavily and very favourably annotated.<sup>60</sup> Gladstone devoted the remainder of his memorandum to a discussion of this work. Even so he does not uniformly agree with Palmer in all judgements, and there are various annotations of disapproval.<sup>61</sup> Gladstone wrote that Palmer’s argument was not original and implied that he agreed with the broad outline of Palmer’s views and his method, rather than any of his specific conclusions. Yet the book provided a welcome and ‘Butlerian’ confirmation of his views.

Like Bishop Temple in an essay much misapprehended at the time of publication, he finds (p. 4) an analogy between the growth of the individual and the education of the race. In the individual life he enumerates the five stages of infancy, childhood, youth, early manhood and full maturity. Various races have received various portions (p. 7) of the divine commission which (p. 1) gave out divine truth not only at sundry times but in sundry parts. The choicest treasure was that of the spiritual truths entrusted to the Jews by a gradual and progressive movement. There is no novelty in this preliminary position. Dr Mozley, one of the ablest theologians of his day, saw in it the means of solving many problems which arise in the interpretation of ancient scripture.<sup>62</sup>

What impressed Gladstone above all was Palmer’s method of applying this evolutionary (implicitly linear, partial, but sufficient), inspiration to the contents of the Old Testament. Gladstone/Palmer saw inspiration at its fullest or most inwardly suffused in the moral

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<sup>58</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, f. 128 memorandum on Holy Spirit, inspiration 1894.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 128. Ebenezer Reeves Palmer M.A. An author virtually unknown in Gladstone’s day and ours. At the time of writing this book, Palmer was about to end his period as minister of Camden Street Congregational Church, North Shields, (1888-1892). Taken from *The History of St. Columba’s United Reform Church, Northumberland Square, North Shields*, <http://www.geocities.com/stcolumbasurc/historybooklet>.

<sup>60</sup> *The Development of Revelation: An Attempt to Elucidate the Nature and Meaning of Old Testament Inspiration. A Series of Studies by E. Reeves Palmer, North Shields*, (London, 1892).

<sup>61</sup> E.g. p. 225. On the sentence, “Uninspired penitents find sometimes a miserable consolation in the thought that they are victims of fate, suffering the inevitable doom of nemesis, which has driven them to the crime” Gladstone has made a mark of reservation. In the memorandum on inspiration of 1894, ff. 129-30.

<sup>62</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, Memorandum on inspiration, 1894, ff. 129-30.



and spiritual contents of the Old Testament.<sup>63</sup> This is similar to Gladstone's view of the 'hermeneutic key' of the Genesiac Cosmogony to be only moral and spiritual truth. In such cases Hebrew chronology, and the historical, geographical and cultural aspects of ancient Israel (that is, the purely descriptive part of the text), although subject to a degree of inspiration are not crucial to the Old Testament's overall truthfulness and divine authority. The previous chapter showed how Gladstone exempted the proem to Genesis from this. This is shown in the section below on Gladstone's analysis of the remaining Pentateuchal narratives.<sup>64</sup>

In his book Palmer outlined what he saw as the development of revelation upon the analogy of human growth as follows:

1. The Patriarchal age. Childhood of man-the revelation of sin and its consequences.
2. The Mosaic economy. Boyhood or youth of man. A period of education and discipline. Revelation of God's holiness, sovereignty and will.
3. The early Prophetic period. Samuel to Elisha. Early manhood. Revelation of profounder spiritual realities, truer revelation and a deeper knowledge of God.
4. The later Prophets. Isaiah to Jeremiah. Mature manhood. Revelation of helplessness and the need of salvation. God's love, pity and power to save.
5. Pre/Post Exilic Messianic expectation (my phrase). Atonement by the sacrifice of an innocent saviour becomes more and more clearly defined and intense in the man of God's people from second Isaiah onwards.<sup>65</sup>

Other writings such as the Psalms are assigned their place within this framework.<sup>66</sup> Palmer, notes Gladstone, saw "the consummation of the process reached in Christ: who contradicted nothing that had been revealed but only completed it. Upon this

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, f.130.

<sup>64</sup> See *IR*, especially pp. 27, 100-103, 106 ff and 171; and *SPB*, pp. 359, 362 and 396-97.

<sup>65</sup> Palmer, *Development of Revelation*, pp. 10-12; and GP Add Mss 44776, inspiration, 1894, f. 131.

<sup>66</sup> Palmer, *Development of Revelation*, pp. 220-26.

completion followed a difference of conception in the minds of man".<sup>67</sup> It was as if the dark rays of the spectrum suddenly vanished to reveal the pure light.<sup>68</sup> Such inspiration by spiritual infusion led to a development of revelation; an increase in spiritual truth that culminated in Jesus Christ as the perfect revelation of God. Historical and literary criticism could not touch such a revelation that transcended its circumstances. Yet the valid, legitimate conclusions of such criticism could be accepted without impairing the idea of the divine afflatus and affecting the essential spiritual core of revelation.<sup>69</sup> This argument is very close to that of Gladstone, who obviously found Palmer's book energising.

In a survey of Gladstone's reading on inspiration there is a pronounced tendency for him to concentrate in annotating books that stress the same or similar views. Thus in J. Paterson Smyth's *How God Inspired the Bible*<sup>70</sup> Gladstone notes with approval the following: that inspiration is mainly a moral and spiritual endowment which primarily enlightened, and 'elated' the mind;<sup>71</sup> that it is not necessary for all of the Bible to contain revelation whereas it may all be inspired;<sup>72</sup> and that Christ and the New Testament writers clearly saw this inspiration lay not in the language of scripture but in the inner substance of the thought.<sup>73</sup> He also notes Smyth's quotation of Butler's Analogy (Part Two, Chapter 2) that no Biblical statement is one of universal, absolute inerrancy. For Christ, the Apostles and the Prophets nowhere promised that divine revelation should be.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> GP Add Mss 44776, inspiration, 1894, f. 131.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> See references below and Palmer, *Development of Revelation*, p. 294.

<sup>70</sup> Another minor, popularising author of the day. J. Paterson Smyth, *How God Inspired the Bible. Thoughts for Present Disquiet*, (Dublin, 1892). Gladstone also used and cited Smyth's *The Old Documents and the New Bible. An Easy Lesson for the People in Biblical Criticism*, (London, 1890) in *IR* on the chapter on Mosaic legislation. On p. 195 of *IR* there are citations of Smyth's *Old Documents* from pp. 42, 66 and 90; and on p. 196 of *IR* from p. vii and on p. 205 of *IR*, pp. 118 and 149. Furthermore, on p. 229 of *How God Inspired the Bible*, there is a quote from Gladstone recommending Smyth's *Old Documents*: "I find the work itself most interesting. I have rarely seen the faculty of lucid exposition more conspicuously displayed". Both books, like Palmer, are confirmatory rather than originators of Gladstone's views.

<sup>71</sup> Smyth, *How God Inspired the Bible*, p. 102.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39. Butler's quote is "We are in sort Judges beforehand...by whatever method and in what proportion it were to be expected that this supernatural light and instruction would be offered us. The only question...concerning the authority of Scripture [is] whether it be what it claims to be, not whether it be a book of such or so promulged as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing Divine revelation should. And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor early disputes about the authors, nor any other things of like kind, though they have been much more considerable than they are, could overthrow the authority of



Similarly, in his annotations of Charles Gore's essay from *Lux Mundi*, 'The Holy Spirit and the Incarnation', there are many marks of notice and approval and few of disapprobation.<sup>75</sup> In this seminal and controversial essay, Gore argued that all peoples have shared in a general divine inspiration, but that of the Jewish race was of a categorically different order. It was supernatural. In particular the Prophets, Psalmists, moralists and historians underwent a process of divine inspiritement. This inspiration was of various degrees but always connected with 'the knowledge of God and of the spiritual life'.<sup>76</sup> The inspiration of the Pentateuch, for example, lay solely in keeping before the chosen people the record of how God had dealt with them through imparting the principles of true religion and progressive morality.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, Gladstone notes with endorsement Gore's claim that in the historical sections of the Old Testament there is 'a considerable idealising element'.<sup>78</sup>

These authors, and Gladstone's marginalia, are representative of the kind of books read by Gladstone on this subject. Furthermore, this mode of investigation through his reading was not limited to the last decade of his life. At the beginning of the period under study he is noting the following quote of Bishop Hinds of Norwich on inspiration in a book by John MacNaught on *The Doctrine of Inspiration*:<sup>79</sup>

the rule which Scripture itself furnishes is, that, as far as it is religious instruction it is infallible; as far as it is not, its authority is that which attaches to the work of an honest and sincere author and varies according to his individual circumstances, and the circumstances of the country and the age in which he wrote.<sup>80</sup>

Any development in Gladstone's later thought on inspiration, while still orthodox in the sense of a real, objective inspiration, is expressed in a moderate and 'liberal' style. This is in contrast to studies and biographies that continue to portray Gladstone as a rigid,

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Scripture, unless the Prophets, Apostles, or Our Lord had provided that the book containing the Divine Revelation should be secure from those things".

<sup>75</sup> C. Gore, 'The Holy Spirit and Inspiration', in Gore, (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation*, First edition, (London, 1889), 315-62. Read 31/1/90 and the preface to *Lux Mundi*, also by Gore, read 14/9/90.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342-43.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344-45.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>79</sup> John MacNaught, *The Doctrine of Inspiration: Being an Inquiry Concerning the Infallibility Inspiration and Authority of Holy Writ*, (London, 1859). According to Gladstone's diary read in late October 1859.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57. Quote from Bishop Hind of Norwich, *Inspiration*, (London, 1831), p. 152.

conservative thinker. This development can be seen in a casual letter to one of his interlocutors,

No doubt some real impediment may be created by the injudicious claims of those who have not perceived that Inspiration is not necessarily uniform and may be adjusted by the Divine Wisdom to varieties of time, character, and circumstances. Among its range of variety I take it to be the degree in which it includes the company of elements not inspired. Again the inspiration of one who has received special commands, in the manner of describing the execution of those commands, may differ as to many points from the general inspiration accorded to those who have worked under the general laws of duty.<sup>81</sup>

Revelation is progressive, but only within the bounds of scripture. As Gladstone stated to Colenso in the 1860s divine revelation had ended with the life of Christ and the composition of the New Testament:

Religious like political discussion is in the main the treatment by present minds of the labours of the past: and these laws are vital, which relate to our modes of dealing with what other men have done in our own line of labour. Most especially however is this true in religion, if there be such a thing as revealed religion, since the revelation, if any, is now past, and we with no other than ordinary means, sit as judges in a sense upon those who by the hypothesis had in certain cases extraordinary communications.<sup>82</sup>

Nowhere in his writings does Gladstone argue that genuine and new revelation has been imparted since the end of the apostolic period. This separates him from radical liberal theologians, especially German or German-influenced from the period. For example, his annotations and marginalia of a book by J. T. Sunderland on the origin of the Bible advocating continuous revelation (since inspiration is essentially increased human awareness of God) are replete with notes of strong disapproval and astonishment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> GP Add Mss 44519, f. 9, Gladstone to McCormick, Copy, 12 August 1894.

<sup>82</sup> GP Add Mss 44415, ff. 38-39, incomplete draft letter to Colenso, 10 August 1868.

<sup>83</sup> J. T. Sunderland, *The Bible. Its Origin, Growth and Character, and its Place Among the Sacred Books of the World. Together with a List of Books for Study and Reference with Critical Comments*, (New York, 1893). See marks of disapproval and reservation on pp. 38-39, 40-42, 45, 47, 51-52, 227, 232, 249, 251, 254, 256 and 258. For example, Sunderland, on pp. 38-39 wrote, "It is the invaluable achievement of the Higher Biblical criticism of the past fifty years that it has made clear and undisputable both the fact and the main steps of this remarkable development". That is, the ethical and spiritual religion of Jesus and Paul somehow rose up from a Hebrew stage of primitive nature worship and sacrifice. In the margin Gladstone has written 'X-Results of Evolution!'



What is more, nowhere does he approve, or see as legitimate, for example, the opinions of John Page Hopps, a Unitarian minister of advanced opinions. In a letter of July 1890, Hopps, responding to Gladstone's articles on the Old Testament in *Good Words* magazine, puts forward the idea that the Divine immanence of God suggests an ongoing revelation and a gradual enlightenment of the human mind in all peoples and all religions. This nullifies the concept of preternatural inspiration.<sup>84</sup> As seen in chapter one, Gladstone rejected immamentalism when connected with the life of Christ.

In addition, Gladstone does not resort to Alfred Cave's complicated theories of inspiration and Hegelian dialectics as a convincing proof of revelation in defence of a very conservative view of the Bible. And this despite the fact that Gladstone sympathised with Cave's overall conservative defence of the Bible against radical German critics.<sup>85</sup> Gladstone's views are that of a 'liberal conservative' and not of an inflexible or obscurantist tenor.<sup>86</sup> His ideas on the development of revelation correspond closely with ideas expressed in his early book of 1840, *Church Principles Considered in Their Results*, on the development of doctrine from apostolic times.

In this book, an expansion of notebooks on the subject from 1832-34, he adopted the distinction between the external vehicle of the Church and its 'internal character'. Development is not the formulation of new knowledge or truths previously un-revealed by God, but a process of clarification of ideas already possessed in Holy Scripture. There was a careful distinction made between the Church having truth without fully comprehending it. Development was simply a dual process of combating erroneous interpretations of scripture (and thus clarifying the divine revelation), whilst carefully and provisionally explicating the truth of revelation by deduction. This adapted and prepared it for the use of the Church. This is what he called "bringing the bud to flower"; making clear the truth already possessed though perhaps unrecognised and not yet fully articulated.<sup>87</sup>

This is the same logical progression as his understanding of inspiration and development, as shown above, particularly in his discussion of Palmer. In *Progress of*

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<sup>84</sup> GP Add Mss 44510, ff. 171-79, J. Page Hopps to Gladstone, 15 July 1890.

<sup>85</sup> See Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 242 and Gladstone, *IR*, p. 173.

<sup>86</sup> Alfred Cave, *The Battle of the Standpoints. The Old Testament and the Higher Criticism*, (London, 1890). However, see especially p. 336 of *The Inspiration of the Old Testament Inductively Considered. The Seventh Congregational Union Lectures*, (London, 1888).

<sup>87</sup> D. Nicholls, 'Gladstone and the Anglican Critics of Newman', in J. D. Bastable, (ed.), *Newman and Gladstone: Centennial Essays*, (Dublin, 1978), pp. 121-23 and Ramm, *Gladstone's Religion*, pp. 331-32.



*Doctrine in the New Testament*, by the 1864 Bampton lecturer, T. D. Bernard, an alternative response to Gladstone's answer to biblical criticism is essayed. Much like Hopps, Bernard argued that revelation was still incomplete and not confined to scripture. God was still dispensing divine truth, still working through history by revelation.<sup>88</sup>

Logically, Gladstone's discussion on inspiration is consistent. By working out (in public and private) a method he suggested the reconciliation of an objective revelation (under-girded by inspiration), given once and for all in the Bible, with the subjective response of the human mind to that revelation. This is because the reconciliation can only be relative in human terms, given his epistemological views and anti-empiricism. It is little wonder, then, that he was not perturbed by contemporary developments in Anglo-Catholic theology as expressed in *Lux Mundi* by Gore and Aubrey L. Moore. They all agreed that revelation is definite and concluded with Christ, but that human apprehension of this message is provisional, ongoing and never perfect.<sup>89</sup>

In a memorandum on 'Jahvez-name of God', Gladstone outlines an excellent example of scripture itself proclaiming progressive revelation within a providential context.<sup>90</sup> Here is scriptural warrant for his theory of progression within, but not beyond, the bounds of the Bible. Gladstone wrote,

the introduction of the name Jahve into Scripture, not only has supplied the occasion, and found as it were the fountainhead, of all the newer criticism from the time of Astruc onwards, but it is in itself more important and suggestive when we consider that it does not represent a movement or development of human ideas, but that it is declared by the writer of the book of Exodus. The book of Exodus in its commencement makes no separate claim to divine inspiration. But when in the third chapter Moses receives his commission he asks for an alteration of it[,] which he can lay before the people to induce them to give him credit. This is furnished in a direct and solemn communication to him from God, authorising him to make God known by a new name not theretofore in use. God had previously been known as the Elohim signifying powers or energies: is now to be known as the I am, the one perpetual, self-dependent existence. The introduction of such a name at such a time seems to be in accordance with every circumstance of antecedent probability.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> L. E. Elliot-Binns, *English Thought 1860-1900. The Theological Aspect*, (London, 1956), pp. 181-82.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182-84. See also, N. S. de Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defence of Infallibilism in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Texts and Studies in Religion, Volume 33, (Queenston, 1987), pp. 125 and 140.

<sup>90</sup> GP Add Mss 44793, ff. 234-39, Undated (1890s) memorandum on Jahvez - Name of God.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 234-35.



The conception of God as Elohim-Creator had by the time of the exodus of Israel become debased and corrupted by nature worship. The new name of God indicated His complete separation from these ideas. However, in the Promised Land such opportunities for further corruption would be immeasurably increased after a comparatively static and homogeneous period of captivity. This would be a great temptation to the conquering Israelites whose social and political ascendancy was bound to include various degrees of cultural absorption from the existing Canaanite societies.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore the occasion was most appropriate for fortifying them with a pure belief in the true nature of God. Idolatry beginning probably in simple and milder forms such as sun worship and the like had degenerated to describe the name and attributes of the deity to the grossest human passions, and thus a directly divine sanction for the exercise of lust. By the explicit revelation of God as the I AM, the divine idea was removed in human conception to the furthest possible point from the degradation of those practices which brought the peoples possessed of Palestine to the forfeiture of their national existence and their political freedom.<sup>93</sup>

Again this is no isolated idea. In annotating William Robertson Smith's *The Prophets of Israel*,<sup>94</sup> in 1882, Gladstone has written 'NB ma' against the following comment: "As for the common notion that the name Jehovah expresses the idea of absolute and unconditioned existence, that is a mere fiction of Alexandrian philosophy, absurdly inconsistent with the language of the Old Testament". A mark of approbation is, however, indicated in Gavin Carlyle's *Moses and the Prophets*<sup>95</sup> (read 1890) where he comments: "Elohim is the name of God in connection with His supreme creative power, pointing, certainly, to more than one person in the Godhead. Jehovah is the name of God in connection with the covenant of grace, exhibiting His special relationship to men as covenant God, associated, as we believe, with the second person of the Godhead". Even stronger are Gladstone's marks and comments on Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, read in 1873. Against Arnold's idealistic conception of God, his marks vary from puzzlement to astonishment. Where Arnold<sup>96</sup> claimed Old Testament writers were

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 235-36.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 236-37.

<sup>94</sup> *The Prophets of Israel and Their Place in History, to The Close of the Eighth Century B.C. Eight Lectures by W. Robertson Smith, LL.D.* (Edinburgh, 1882) p. 62.

<sup>95</sup> G. Carlyle, *Moses and the Prophets; their Unshaken Testimony as Against the 'Higher Criticism' Based on Naturalism*, (London, 1890), p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma. An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible*, (London, 1873), pp. 30-32.



moved by a tendency “not ourselves” (i.e. their view of God) and which under Moses led them to a certain stage in their idea of God, a Jehovah, or, “the eternal not ourselves making for righteousness”, Gladstone has written, “how does he know?” that this was Moses’ unaided conception. Where Arnold contends Jehovah stands for the idea of an “eternal righteousness who loveth righteousness”, Gladstone comments, “why then not said?” that is, in the actual text.<sup>97</sup> Indeed the whole Arnoldian project of substituting culture for religion finds no acceptance with Gladstone here or in his reading of Arnold’s *Last Essays on Religion*. Both works are heavily and disapprovingly annotated.

What are the conclusions to be reached from the above analysis?

Firstly, that Gladstone along with other critics and theologians is an example of the general Anglican position of the Nineteenth century that saw the Bible as divinely communicated information e.g. about the divine attributes, the lessons of human duty, pointers to Christ and the redemption.<sup>98</sup> In Gladstone’s case the idea of the inspiration behind this was still “objective”, nevertheless liberalised, non-verbal and inductive. This appears closest to Manly’s idea of graduated inspiration, but only as applied to the revelation contained within the canon of Scripture.<sup>99</sup> Additionally his view of inspiration as dynamical and revelation as dispensationalist brings him closer than is usually noticed to some of the theoretical arguments on progression of the earlier Nineteenth century Liberal Anglican theologians, even if this is not an adoption of all their views.<sup>100</sup> In particular Gladstone shares a number of presuppositions with Henry Hart Millman, even if these are expressed and applied differently.<sup>101</sup> Unlike in Thomas Arnold and later Frederick Temple, the role of German idealist philosophy seems to have played little or no part in Gladstone’s views. This was by choice as Gladstone’s apologetic could have accommodated this thinking. Millman’s emphasis on inspiration and revelation within the context of divine providence is particularly close to that of Gladstone.<sup>102</sup>

Secondly, there are a number of antecedent certainties as regards inspiration drawn by the analogy of other divine works and dispensations. Using Aristotle and

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> J. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century. England and Germany*, (London, 1984), p. 281.

<sup>99</sup> Manly, *Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 52.

<sup>100</sup> Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism*, p. 125 and D. Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History*, (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 71-73.

<sup>101</sup> R. E. Clements, ‘The Intellectual Background of H. H. Millman’s *The History of the Jews* (1829) and Its Impact on English Biblical Scholarship’, in H. G. Reventlow and W. Farmer (eds.), *Biblical Studies and the Shifting of Paradigms, 1850-1914*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 192, (Sheffield, 1995), pp. 246-71, *passim*.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.



Butler, Gladstone argued God's method of self-disclosure is probability not perfection. This is compatible with the idea of inspiration as one of sufficiency and not infallibility. Concepts of approximation and adaptation show then, partly, Gladstone's ideas on inspiration were a working out of his wider Christian philosophical presuppositions. Indeed he operates fully within these givens to uphold an essentially moral and spiritual truth of revelation, without ever providing a detailed and critically tested set of criteria to distinguish between this central material and what is merely reflective of the culture in which it was given. The veracity and historicity of scriptural witness is taken for granted.

Thirdly, as to overall originality, the idea of progressive revelation was a commonplace of theology in the later Victorian period, especially if applied, as in the case of Gladstone, to the Old Testament.<sup>103</sup> Philosophically, Gladstone is firmly within the tradition emphasised by John Rogerson of a strong empirical (but *not* empiricist) or Lockean basis for Nineteenth Century English theology in contrast to a German-Idealist, subjectivist philosophy. This was not an acceptance of Locke's overall position because Gladstone can incorporate idealist, non-empirical strands. This English tradition is the idea that knowledge or information is external to the observer. *A priori* reasoning and hypothesis was eschewed in favour of recognising supernatural evidences of revelation that could be defended upon the basis of reason and faith. Hence the stress by Gladstone that inspiration is knowledge communicated from God external to the mind of man.<sup>104</sup>

### Pentateuchal Criticism.

The remainder of this chapter will involve a detailed analysis of Gladstone's defence (outside of the Proem to Genesis) of the Mosaic input to the Pentateuch. It will be prefaced by some remarks of his motives and of his opinion of Higher Criticism itself. It was only in the 1890s and after the defence of the Genesiac Cosmogony that Gladstone

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<sup>103</sup> Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism*, pp. 141 and 244-47; Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism*, pp. 105-15; W. B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and the Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*, (London, 1954), pp. 105-106 and G. Parsons, 'Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain: From Controversy to Acceptance', in G. Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain: Volume IV, Interpretations*, (Manchester, 1988) 239-57, especially p. 251.

<sup>104</sup> Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism*, pp. 8-10 and 280. Also J. Rogerson, 'Philosophy and the Rise of Biblical Criticism: England and Germany', in, S. W. Sykes, (ed.), *England and Germany. Studies in Theological Diplomacy*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), 63-79, especially pp. 65-66.



turned to a *specific*, detailed examination of the remainder of the Pentateuch as the table<sup>105</sup> shows below. It indicates the main influences on Gladstone.

<u>Published Works.</u>	<u>Private Letters.</u>	<u>Private Reading, including date read, (where known).</u>
Impregnable Rock, 1890.	Lady Burdett-Coutts, 1865, 1866	Jewish Reply to Colenso, Part One, 1865. Not recorded in diary.
Introduction to Sheppard's Bible, 1895.	Bishop Colenso, 1867, 1868.	J. B. Mozley, 1877. Lecture IV on Jael. 21/1/77.
	Lord Acton, 1888, 1889, 1890.	Bleek-Wellhausen, <i>Einleitung</i> , 1889? 17/11/89. Wellhausen.*
	F. Herbert Stead, 1890, 1891.	Wellhausen, 1890. 8/5/90 and 25/8/90.
	Mr Christian Ginsburg, 1890.	Carlyle, 1890. 7/7/91 (not 90 as in diary index), and 11/7/91.
	Letter to T. D. Acland, 1893.	Paterson-Smyth, 1890. 24/11/89, 1/4/90 and 9, 13/4/90.
	Rev. Malcolm MacColl, 1895.	Girdlestone, 1890. 8/2/91.
		Spencer, 1892. 27/11/92,

<sup>105</sup> **Letters.** 1. Gladstone to Burdett-Coutts, 44408, ff. 43-44, 17 October 1865, 44410, ff. 80-83, 22 April 1866. The originals are located in the Burdett-Coutts Papers BCP 1379, ff. 128-62, Lambeth Palace Library. 2. Colenso to Gladstone, 44413 ff. 236-69, 16 November 1867, Gladstone to Colenso, incomplete draft, 44415, ff. 347-50, 10 August 1868. 3. Acton to Gladstone, 44094, ff. 39-40, 3 December 1888, f. 68, 15 October 1889, ff. 74-75 14 March 1890; Gladstone to Acton (copies), ff 30-31, 13 May 1888, ff. 44-51, 23 January 1889, ff. 53-55, 28 April 1889, ff. 62-64, 4 August 1889, ff. 76-79, 21 March 1890 (but actually 4 March 1890). 4. F. Herbert Stead to Gladstone, 44512 ff. 37-38, 16 January 1891, ff. 100-101, 13 February 1891. 5. Christian Ginsburg to Gladstone, 44510, ff. 36-37, 21 May 1890, ff. 47-48, 25 May 1890, ff. 59-61, 2 June 1890. 6. Malcolm MacColl to Gladstone, 44245, ff. 161-64, 12 April 1895, ff. 187-88, 9 August 1895. **Books.** 1. Anonymous, *A Jewish Reply to Dr. Colenso's Criticisms of the Pentateuch. Part One. Issued by the Jewish Association of Religious Knowledge*, (London, 1865). 2. J. B. Mozley, *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages and Their Relation to the Old Testament Faith. Lectures Delivered to the Graduates of the University of Oxford*, (London, 1873). 3. Bleek/Wellhausen, *Einleitung das Alte Testament*, (1886). 4. Wellhausen, Julius, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, (1889), *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, (1878), English translation, (1885) and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on Israel (1883). 5. G. Carlyle, *Moses and the Prophets*, 6. Paterson-Smyth, *The Old Documents and How God Inspired the Bible*, 7. R. B. Girdlestone, *The Foundations of the Bible: Studies in Old Testament Criticism*, (London, 1890), 8. F. E. Spencer, *Did Moses Write the Pentateuch After All?* (London, 1892), 9. Lord A. C. Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, *The Books of Chronicles in Relation to the Pentateuch and 'Higher Criticism'*, (London, 1892), 10. Palmer, *The Development of Revelation*, 11. W. Spiers, *The Age and Authorship of the Pentateuch*, (London, 1895), 12. C. Jerdan, *Are the Books of Moses Holy Scripture? Or, The Modern Theory of the Pentateuch Anti-Biblical*, (Edinburgh, 1895).

\* This is not the book stated in the diary as C. I. Black, *The Proselytes of Israel*, (1888); but, in fact, Wellhausen's *Geschichte Israels*, (1878).



		pp. 1-57 only
		Hervey, 1892. 3/12/93.
		Palmer, 1892. 12/4/92-17/4/92
		Spiers, 1895, pp. 1-118 only. Untraced in diary.
		Jerdan, 1895. Untraced in diary.

It appears that Gladstone was prompted by Donald Macleod, editor of *Good Words* magazine, following his successful review of *Robert Elsmere* and his riposte of Colonel Ingersoll, to write on the Old Testament in terms of apologetics, and that he had some reservations about even his eventual limited contribution. It should be emphasised that Gladstone did not engage in public debate on the higher criticism by choice, but, rather, by a half hearted promise. He wrote plaintively to Lord Acton in April 1889,

Mary showed me a letter of recent date, which referred to the idea of my writing on the Old Testament. The matter stands thus. An appeal [by Macleod] was made to me to write something on the general position and claims of Holy Scripture for the working man. I gave no pledge, but read (what was for me) a good deal on the laws and history of the Jews with only two results, first deepened impressions of the vast interest and importance attaching to them, and of their fitness to be made the subject of a telling popular account. Secondly a discovery of the necessity of reading much more. But I have never in this connection thought much about what is called the criticism of the Old Testament, only seeking to learn how far it impinged upon the matters.<sup>106</sup>

Even during the process of proofreading, he continued to lament to Acton,

I also send proof of an article on the Old Testament intended for *Good Words*.<sup>107</sup> I do not feel at all sure that I have been right in undertaking to yield to this testimony, though I feel I have something to say if only I can say it. The determining motive is a promise given 18

<sup>106</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, ff. 53-54, 28 April 1889, Gladstone to Acton. Copy in Gladstone's hand.

<sup>107</sup> 'Office and Work of Old Testament in Outline', appeared in *Good Words* in June 1890.

months ago [about October 1888] and from which I should find it hard to get release.<sup>108</sup>

It is only possible to hypothesise on why it was not until the 1890s that Gladstone, however reluctantly, turned to public discussion of the Pentateuch. Before then he had written extensively on the poems of Homer and their connection to the culture of ancient Greece, and had compared them with contemporary Old Testament writings. David Bebbington has convincingly argued for the deep religious motives behind such work. Among the most persistent of Gladstone's themes was the theory of a primitive revelation, first set out at length at the beginning of volume 2 of *Studies in Homer and the Homeric Age*, 1858, but much discussed and refined in later years.<sup>109</sup> This was the idea of an authentic revelation of truth by God given to all peoples (via Adam and Noah) before the Abrahamic promise. This included the descendants of the peoples eventually known as the Greeks. By that time this original well of truth had been polluted through human corruption and debasement, but enough of a trace remained in the Homeric epics to substantiate the theory according to Gladstone. The Hebrews by that time, of course, had a special channel of revelation.<sup>110</sup> Bebbington says, "Here was an alternative explanation of ancient religion that, by insisting on a place for divine revelation, provided a buttress for the supernatural".<sup>111</sup> More than that, the Greek epics contained faint proto-elements of specifically Christian revelation such as the idea of the *logos* and the trinity.<sup>112</sup> Bebbington concludes by saying, "the attempt to vindicate revelation by the means of Homer was his most sustained response to the Victorian crisis of belief".<sup>113</sup> Since the methods used included source criticism, linguistic analysis, historical criticism and attention to authorship and dating, this conclusion could be extended to argue that before the 1890s this was Gladstone's engagement by proxy with the Higher Critics of scripture, and a clear example of large-scale involvement in methodological issues. This is especially so if one realises that for much of the 1860s and 1870s Gladstone was

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<sup>108</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, f. 77, 21 March 1890, Gladstone to Acton. Copy in Gladstone's hand. According to the diary, Vol. 12 1887 - 1891, p. 275, Gladstone wrote to Acton on March 4, and not the 21, 1890.

<sup>109</sup> Gladstone, *Studies in Homer*, Vol. 2, pp. 2-17 and 521-23. Also, Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>110</sup> D. W. Bebbington, Gladstone and Homer, in D. W. Bebbington, and R. Swift, (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, 57-74, especially p. 61.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



preoccupied with developments in Roman Catholic theology and ecclesiology, and in the 1880s with attempts to combat scepticism and unbelief.<sup>114</sup>

There is an excellent summary of his views on Higher Criticism as a method of study in a letter composed in December 1891 to the editor of *The Record*, which appeared in that publication in January 1892. It repays reproduction in full.

Sir,

Cordially wishing well to your efforts to uphold in full the reverence due to Holy Scriptures, I feel myself unable to offer any material contribution towards them since I am not an expert, and therefore am disentitled to pronounce any positive judgement on what is termed the higher criticism.

Looking to the tone, the methods and some of the incidents of the controversy on the destructive side, I am certainly inspired, not with confidence, but with misgiving, as to such of the foreign 'higher critics' as I have had direct knowledge of; but I feel it may be justly observed that misgivings are not in themselves arguments.<sup>115</sup>

My mind, too, is perhaps subject to an adverse bias from my protracted observation of a controversy parallel, and analogous in some important respects, on the poems of Homer; for, in that instance, after a long familiarity with that subject I frankly avow that I am driven to entertain a mean opinion of the negative speculations.

My life has also embraced the period in which the battery of destructive criticism was directed, and that by very able hands, against a very large proportion of Roman history. But many consider that by the work of Sir George Lewis the destructive criticism was in this case itself destroyed; and I am under the impression that the ancient record has undergone a certain amount of revival and authority.

Anything I have to say in the way of argument on the subject will naturally be sought in my small book [*Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*]; but there are two remarks I would venture to offer, especially to those who may be approaching the question for the first time.

One of them is, that we must be on our guard against drawing our strength of persuasion or warmth of affection into the field as if it had the force of arguments; but should, in endeavouring to defend the Scriptures, proceed upon the very same consideration

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<sup>114</sup> Also general High Church/ Anglo-Catholic dislike of contemporary German theology.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, the diary entries for 9 - 12 December 1884 and 27 January 1885. This is on E. W. Reuss, *Geschichte der Heiligen Schriften Alten Testaments*, (Braunschweig, 1881). When writing on Genesis and science Gladstone had found this German critic, "wordy, oracular, dogmatic to a degree". GP Add Mss 44093 f. 254, Gladstone to Acton, copy, 27 January 1885 in *Diary*, Vol. 11 *loc cit.*, p. 283.



of evidence and general reasonableness as would govern our mental processes in other matters.

The other is, that when the arguments of specialists, pointing to negative conclusions, are pressed upon us by the authority they draw from their several pursuits, we should be aware of haste, and should exercise the right of reserving our judgements, even if we yield a provisional assent, until we know when that specialism has said its last word, and until we have had the opportunity of comparing their results with wider considerations belonging to the fields of history, philosophy and religion taken at large.

W. E. Gladstone.

Biarritz, 30 December (1891).<sup>116</sup>

Nevertheless, Gladstone can accept, or at the very least accommodate, the positive results of Biblical criticism when applied to a linguistic and historical study of the current text *qua* text rather than as scripture. Subject to the above presuppositions and qualifications given to the readers of *The Record* and earlier his *Impregnable Rock*, this viewpoint is going far to meet the critics on their own grounds and agenda, even if it is only a provisional acceptance. In point of fact, this reconciliation qualifies the predominant view of historians that after 1850 there was little or no development in Gladstone's theological position, and that he remained the strictest of orthodox Christians with very conservative opinions, indicative of his mind in general. Certainly a common complaint received by Gladstone as correspondent on this topic, was that he was conceding far too much ground to the critics by tacitly accepting important parts of their arguments. Several very conservative Christian journals gave Gladstone a hostile review because of this.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> GGP 1649. Bundle labelled by Gladstone, 'January 1892, The Record on Biblical Criticism' See also, GP Add Mss 44094, ff. 62-66, Gladstone to Acton, 4 August 1889. Copy by Gladstone.

<sup>117</sup> Those prominent in support of Gladstone were J. J. Lias, 25 January 1892, GGP 1649 and a review by James Robertson of *Impregnable Rock* in the *Critical Review?* pp. 207-211, GGP 1628; GP Add Mss 44245, ff. 187-88, MacColl to Gladstone 9 August 1895 and GP Add Mss 44552, ff. 23-66, Wentworth Webster to Gladstone, 16 August 1895. Critical opponents included, for example, reviews contained in GGP 1649 and 1628. *The Jewish Word*, 11 December 1885 and 1 January 1886. *The Record*, 15 and 22 January 1892. *The Bible Treasury* (1890?) on article one of *Good Words*, April 1890. *The Spectator*, 29 March 1890. *The Agnostic Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 9, 2 March 1895, pp. 129-30. *The Freethinker*, Vol. IX, No. 14, 6 April 1890 pp. 157-58. *The Magazine and Book Review*, 27 September 1890, p. 60. See also GP Add Mss 44509, ff. 339-40, R. S. Anderson to Gladstone 26 April 1890, 44510, ff. 36-37, Ginsburg to Gladstone, 2 March 1890 and ff. 59-61, 2 June 1890. The last includes three articles by the Rev. K. C. Anderson of Horton Lane Congregational Church, Bradford. They were sent by F. Herbert Stead editor of *The Independent*, a congregational journal in a letter of 16 January 1890, in ff. 39-44. These reviews appeared in *The Independent* in January 1891. See 44510, f. 71 which contains a copy of Gladstone's reply to the editor of *The Independent*, 7 February 1891, "Dear Sir, I thank you for sending me the interesting papers, and I thank Dr.



Why? In the light of comments such as the following,

It appears to me that we may grant, for argument's sake, to the negative or destructive specialist in the field of the ancient Scriptures all which as a specialist he can possibly be entitled to ask, respecting the age, text and authorship of the books, and may hold firmly, as firmly as old, to the ideas justly conveyed by the title I have adopted for these pages, and may invite our fellow men to stand along with us on "the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture".<sup>118</sup>

Referring to a chapter of Gladstone's book of the same title, which he had previously admitted to Acton,

In this paper I have endeavoured to state my relation to the negative criticism. In a word I am but a half-believer in it; and I suppose that in its larger developments it is much contested amongst critics. Nay even in smaller ones as I infer from the opinion of Delitzsch given in his book on the Psalms, about Deutero-Isaiah. But I am fully conscious that I have no title to appear in the field as a disputant against it. I therefore assume provisionally its results: and try to make my argument independently of them.<sup>119</sup>

The last sentence is a crucial qualifier. Gladstone could accept the results of the Higher Criticism as a logical possibility. Even so this was not a total or uncritical acceptance. As with his acceptance of Lewis on authority, Gladstone took only what he wanted from the higher critics. However, he is content, ultimately, to rest his argument independent of total agreement with them. Self-confessing as to the lack of critical skills and acumen to dispute the critics as specialists, he was more than willing to subject their reasoning procedure, presuppositions and historical method to scrutiny and censure.

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Anderson for his words of undeserved personal commendation. I must confess, however, my inability to accept the proposition that the Old Testament literature simply represents the outgrowth of popular life; it being my belief that the ordinary popular life of Aachian Greece was morally higher than that of the ordinary Hebrew of the time of Moses, the Judges and Kings. Of course I do not mean that this is my sole or main reason in the matter. Your very faithful and obedient servant, W.E. Gladstone"

<sup>118</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, f. 78, 21 March 1890, Gladstone to Acton. Copy in Gladstone's hand. Actually written on 4 March 1890. Franz Julius Delitzsch. (1813-1890). German Lutheran theologian and Hebraist. A moderate conservative in terms of his biblical criticism. See his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, (English translation 1883), *Biblical commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, (English translation 1867). Also, *The Old Testament History of Redemption. Lectures...Translated From Manuscript Notes by Samuel Ives Curtiss*, (London, 1888). According to the diary entries Gladstone read Delitzsch on the following occasions: 6, 13, and 20/10/89, 28/1/90, 16 and 23/2/90 and 2/3/90. On Delitzsch see, Rogerson, *Old Testament*, pp. 111-120.

This meant that he would accept critical conclusions only as such criticism related to the present literary form of scripture and left open entirely discussion relating to substance. There may be evolution of the present text of the Pentateuch but such an admission in no way undermines the foundation that they contain genuine and reliable revelation. Especially, when the moral and spiritual authority and essence of the Pentateuch is one of sufficiency, not mathematical completeness.<sup>120</sup>

In addition such conclusions relating to the present text must carry only strictly provisional and revocable assent. Gladstone maintained that the Higher Criticism was often floating, uncertain, and too dependent upon *a priori* verification and unproven hypotheses. Critics often trumpeted their results as true and permanently established when, in reality, they were conditional and liable to development or refutation. Critics themselves often sharply disagreed. The same author could radically contradict himself. Their interpretation could be entirely superseded and need to be reformulated.<sup>121</sup> Thus, Wellhausen, in revising and editing Freiderich Bleek's *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1878, Fifth edition, 1886) sections 220-22, pp. 457-64<sup>122</sup>, led Gladstone to comment,

Wellhausen accepts in a great degree the genuineness of those Davidic Psalms which are contained in the first book of the Psalter. But I have been told that this position has been abandoned, and that, standing as he appears to do at the head of the negative critics, he brings down the general body of the Psalms to a date very greatly below that of the Babylonian exile. It is certainly unreasonable to hold a critic to his conclusions. But, on the other hand, it may be asked whether, in order to warrant confidence, they ought to exhibit some element of stability?<sup>123</sup>

What then was Gladstone's defence of a genuine Mosaic connection with the final form of the written Pentateuch and how did he deal with the Graf-Wellhausen proposition that many of Gladstone's contemporaries, radical as well as conservative, regarded as having dealt a deathblow to an early, historic and largely Mosaic Law?

It is clear that Gladstone's views on this aspect of Pentateuchal criticism had long been in gestation and that the views expressed in the 1890s were mature reflections of a defence long in gestation. His diaries reveal that the period 1862-1864 saw him having to deal with these topics in relation to the publication of the first part of Colenso's *The*

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<sup>120</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 14 and 27.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15 and 20-22.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.



*Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined. With Essays and Reviews*, Colenso's book caused much division in the 1860s, for it seemed to undermine the belief in inspiration of scripture and the ascription of the Pentateuch to Moses as a reliable and historical account.

Colenso's argument extended over seven volumes. Gladstone was sparse in his reading and in detail only concentrated on the first volume, although volume three also contains several annotations, and Gladstone recorded reading part six at least once.<sup>124</sup> In one of two letters to Angela, Lady Burdett-Coutts, Gladstone states "I am very ill acquainted with Bishop Colenso's books, having read only the first part of his argument. Of this I confess I formed a very mean opinion".<sup>125</sup> His negative view of the Bishop's criticism noted, Colenso himself complained in a letter of 1867 that he objected to several of Gladstone's comments on his book.<sup>126</sup> These were reportedly, according to *The Times* of September the fifth of the same year, on the pain and scandal occasioned by Colenso's position on the Pentateuch. The Bishop wrote,

Yet what are the facts of the case? It is undeniable that all the leading critics of the day take substantially the same view, as I do, of the later origin and composite nature of the Pentateuch and the unhistorical character of many of its narratives. I see the 'Spectator' in one of its last issues, Sept. 7, writes as follows:- 'Has Mr Gladstone himself looked at the controversy about the date of the books of the Pentateuch? If he had, a mind so subtle and keen would scarcely ascribe for a moment all these books to Moses, or fail to see that they are full of historical inaccuracies and inconsistencies'.<sup>127</sup>

Gladstone's reply contains the germ of his later views:

With regard, then, to any results you have arrived at respecting the authorship of the Pentateuch and the infallibility of the Bible, I have had enough of the rudiments of theological training to know that I am by no means qualified to pass any judgement upon them; and if on the one hand I contemplate with natural misgiving what I understand to be very sweeping conclusions, I adhere firmly to the other side of the principle that it is our duty to follow Truth according to the best evidences we can procure, up to any point which it may lead us: so that till I have heard I am not able to

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<sup>124</sup> The diary notes Gladstone read Colenso's *Pentateuch*, on three occasions, 7/12/62 (Part One), 7/8/64 (Part Three) and 25/12/72 (Part Six).

<sup>125</sup> GP Add Mss 44408, ff. 43-44, 1 October 1865 and 44410, ff. 80-83, 22 April 1866.

<sup>126</sup> GP Add Mss 44413, ff. 236-39, 16 November 1867 Colenso to Gladstone.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

condemn, and there is little likelihood during the remainder of my life I shall be able to arm myself with the specialities of knowledge, without which I would not divulge of the duty which I designate by the word to hear.<sup>128</sup>

In an article published in 1874, Gladstone labelled Colenso as one who had “unconsciously passed under the dominion of what may be termed the destructive spirit”. In the process, Gladstone claimed, great pain and scandal had wounded the Anglican Church. To Gladstone Colenso was a “neophyte in criticism”.<sup>129</sup>

In 1868 Gladstone had written to Colenso to defend the validity of Old Testament chronology. Gladstone reproved Colenso by arguing, “Historic evidence does not at present warrant the probable existence of the Adamic race for more than some such epoch as from 4000 to 6000 years before the Advent of Christ”.<sup>130</sup> This, according to Gladstone, was the framework within which to locate both Moses and the Mosaic legislation.

However, such a defence was not without problems. In order to be convinced of Gladstone’s argument there was a need for prior Christian faith. Thus, as noted above, his apologetics tended to assume circularity and tendentiousness. For example, the following: sin (original) is a reality, we know this because scripture reveals this; how do we know scripture is true? Because the reality of original sin demonstrates its teaching. Therefore, in his attempt to rationally justify the Pentateuch, Gladstone at times, came close to being a sophist. This penchant must be constantly borne in mind when dealing with his positive statements in regard to the Pentateuch.

Firstly, Gladstone argues for the moral and spiritual uniqueness of Hebrew scripture vis-à-vis contemporaneous sacred books. This is shown by its moral purity and elevation, its applicability to all peoples, its containment of a continuous record of divine superintendence over human affairs and the crucial and necessary revelation of the fall of humanity due to original sin. Hence, the urgent need for redemption is made plain to man.<sup>131</sup>

In this respect the Mosaic legislation is a supplement to, and not an enlargement of, the religion of the Hebrew patriarchs, from Noah to Abraham, which had preceded it.

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<sup>128</sup> GP Add Mss 44415, ff. 347-50, 10 August 1868, incomplete draft by Gladstone.

<sup>129</sup> Gladstone, ‘Bishop Patteson’, *Gleanings*, Vol. II, p. 239. Originally published in *The Quarterly Review*, for October 1874 as a review of *Life of John Coleridge Patteson. Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands. By Charlotte Mary Yonge*, (London, 1874).

<sup>130</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-92 and *SPB* pp. 396-97.



It was not an attempt at theological completeness. Instead, it was a "walled city" for the fulfilment of the Hebrew nation's vital mission. This was to keep pure and alive the doctrines of the One God; of duty and love to Him and to man's neighbours, and the concepts of reward and punishment. This Mosaic dispensation was in turn supplemented by the religion of interior devotion of the Prophets and publicly enacted in the ritual Psalms. The great theme of messianic hope and promise was its core.<sup>132</sup> As we have seen, Gladstone saw revelation as progressive.

Finally, then, Gladstone turns to linguistic and historical studies that have challenged the date and authorship of the Pentateuch, and have brought to light its historical anachronisms, its falsehoods and its contradictions. Gladstone admits he lacks the specialist, detailed, knowledge to be able to answer or refute these *in toto*. Nevertheless, for him, that is in a sense unimportant.<sup>133</sup>

If one were to only take the case of the *Torah* or law, the history of critical opinion on this part of the Pentateuch is conveniently summarised for Gladstone in Bleek-Wellhausen's *Einleitung*, sections 13-17. This highlighted the fact that some critics such as Eichorn had assigned the law to Moses but its enveloping historical narrative to scribes acting under his direction or at a later date. Gladstone is unperturbed as divine inspiration in the Pentateuch is only claimed for the law and not its historical setting. Given Moses' "hard pressed life", such a division of authorial labour would be in itself reasonable as well as convenient.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, "(s)peaking at large, every imaginable difference has prevailed amongst critics themselves as to the source, date and authorship of the books"<sup>135</sup> Critics often made the distinction between substantial authorship and final editing. As late as 1886 Bleek-Wellhausen "held Moses had a hand (*einen antheil*) in the legislative books. Most of the laws only make sense or have a purpose in regard to circumstances which disappeared with the Mosaic period". Paradoxically, by relying heavily on Bleek-Wellhausen, Gladstone notes with approving equanimity that the entire Pentateuch in its present form is not the work of Moses. Even the fact that many parts of it are of later interpolation is accepted by Gladstone, yet "still, the legislation in its spirit and character as a whole, is genuinely Mosaic; and that, in dealing with the Pentateuch we stand, or at least as to the three middle books, upon historical ground, evidently meaning as opposed

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-111.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

to that which is unauthenticated or legendary". Therefore the heart of the legislative and institutional Pentateuchal system is historically trustworthy. Holy Scripture emerges substantially, and in essentials wholly, unhurt from the inquisitive and searching analysis of modern critics.<sup>136</sup>

Gladstone then discusses two remaining issues. The first is the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis. This was for its time the radical supposition that the Pentateuch could be broken down into four main literary sources. These had reached their present form only after the Babylonian exile, that is, hundreds of years after it was believed Moses had lived. This hypothesis, which provided the basis of modern Pentateuchal criticism, won general acceptance in German lands in the 1860s and 1870s. This followed to a lesser extent in Britain by the 1880s. The English version, epitomised in the 1891 work of Samuel Rolls Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, was more conservatively expressed and nuanced in its conclusions.

Unlike Wellhausen, Gladstone did not undertake a similarly detailed historical and linguistic analysis of the existing Pentateuch, lacking the critical scholarly apparatus to do so. Instead, he adopted the arguments of Bleek. On the question of the origin of the Pentateuch, Bleek had gradually moved towards a more conservative, if still critical, position. He had stated that the Priestly legislation (given by Wellhausen as post-exilic and largely a "pious fraud") was Mosaic. As to composition, Bleek favoured the supplementary hypothesis. This revealed how the original Mosaic foundation document or *Grundschrift* was progressively supplemented by material based upon Mosaic traditions.<sup>137</sup>

Gladstone dealt with Wellhausen in a most revealing way. In commenting on Wellhausen's *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der Historischen Bücher*, 1889, Gladstone wrote,

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-75.

<sup>137</sup> Rogerson, *Old Testament*, pp. 130-31. J. H. Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1, A - J*, (Nashville, 1999), pp. 129-130; R. J. Thompson, *Moses and the Law in a Century of Criticism Since Graf*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*, Volume XIX, (Leiden, 1970), pp. 10, 28-29. Bleek's major works on the Pentateuch were 1. *Aphorische Beiträge zu den Untersuchungen über den Pentateuch*, *Biblisch-Exegetisches Repertorium*, 1, (1822), 1-99, 2. *Beiträge zu den Forschungen über den Pentateuch*, *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 3, (1830), 45-64. An English translation, edited by Kamphausen, of Bleek's introduction to the Old Testament appeared in 1860. The second edition was published in 1865. The Wellhausen of 1886 that Gladstone relies on has no translation.



I may observe, however, that this work has neither introduction nor conclusion, neither index nor table of contents, and that it resembles rather the promiscuous gatherings of a note book, or rather, of two notebooks crossing one another, discharged bodily into the printing office, than a regular work of scientific criticism. I must add that in certain cases, where the unity of texts is disputed upon grounds alike cognisable by us all, I find the conclusions of the author as disputable as they are confident. In other instances, numerous enough, assertions were made as if they were oracles, without the slightest explanation, or any indication of their grounds.<sup>138</sup>

On Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1885<sup>^</sup>), and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article (1883), which Gladstone took as the fairest exposition of Wellhausen's view, he comments on Wellhausen's assertion that the Pentateuch (in form and substance) is post-exilic, with only a Mosaic germ thus:

This very startling proposition appears to me to do violence to reason not less glaringly, than any of the assertions ventured by theologians in their days of pride and power...It is a vague, irrational and unscientific method of proceeding to state the Pentateuch was compounded or composed at uncertain times, by uncertain authors, from uncertain materials and to incorporate downright lies and bad faith.<sup>139</sup>

Gladstone believed he could nullify the critics on the grounds of history, a favourite device of his apologetic method. This view was prevalent in the reading he undertook in the late 1880s and the 1890s on the critics of the Pentateuch. This ranged from authors that criticised the intellectual terrorism and rationalism of German critics, to those who used analogy and reason<sup>140</sup> to support a Mosaic authorship or connection<sup>141</sup>. Lastly, Gladstone read on the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable Pentateuchal criticism.<sup>142</sup> Palmer, earlier referred to on inspiration, when dealing specifically with Pentateuchal authorship argued that it was mainly Mosaic, but reserved final judgement. Palmer also allowed for supplements, new material and redactions of a Mosaic core. Further, he stated that even if one allowed for the composite character of the Pentateuch,

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<sup>138</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>^</sup> English translation of *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, (1878).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-77 and 179.

<sup>140</sup> See Spencer, *Did Moses Write the Pentateuch After All?* Spiers, *The Age and Authorship of the Pentateuch*, Carlyle, *Moses and the Prophets*, and Hervey, *The Books of Chronicles in Relation to the Pentateuch*.

<sup>141</sup> See Spiers, *The Age and Authorship of the Pentateuch*.

<sup>142</sup> See Carlyle, *Moses and the Prophets*.

one could not dogmatise to the same degree of confidence as Wellhausen on this. In a letter from Richard Valpy Trench, editor of *Lex Mosaica*<sup>143</sup>, Gladstone received a request to read a book to which Trench had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade Gladstone to contribute. Indeed, the book is still preserved at St. Deiniol's library. It is a series of essays by conservative scholars against the Wellhausen School and in favour of upholding the traditional date and authority of the Law of Moses.

On at least one occasion, Gladstone wrote a congratulatory letter on the defence of the *Torah* against Wellhausen, which the author proudly displayed in his book. This is *Sanctuary and Sacrifice* by W. Baxter.<sup>144</sup> This could hardly have reflected well on Gladstone in informed, academic circles since R. J. Thompson in his study of conservative responses to the critics in late Victorian England has noted:

Imitating Wellhausen's method and eschewing the use of tradition and authorities, he relied on logic, sophistry and sarcasm to make his points. Many of these were well made as subsequent enquiry has proved. It was inevitable that Wellhausen's methods should have called forth this kind of reply, but it is doubtful if scholarly investigation was advanced by it. The volume deserves to be placed alongside the *Prolegomena* if only as an example of the fact that the new orthodoxy was no better fitted to stand against such weapons as Wellhausen had deployed than the old.<sup>145</sup>

Gladstone's second line of defence of the Mosaic Law was the use of his favourite weapons of reason and probability. There are at least ten aspects to this defence, of which the most important are as follows. Firstly, he put his Homeric studies to good use. The existence of Moses is far better established than, for example, that of Lycurgus, the Spartan lawgiver. The Mosaic institutions themselves are 'sufficient' evidence for the existence of Moses. If we believe the existence of Lycurgus from the institutions associated with his name, it is irrational to doubt the existence of Moses and the substance of his life.<sup>146</sup> Why? Because Moses, like Homer, is a supreme example of a

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<sup>143</sup> GP Add Mss 44520, ff. 118-19, 3 April 1895, Trench to Gladstone.

<sup>144</sup> W. L. Baxter, *Sanctuary and Sacrifice. A Reply to Wellhausen*, (London, 1895), p. v "I thank you sincerely for your criticism of Wellhausen, whose works, on a rather slight acquaintance, I have all along mistrusted".

<sup>145</sup> Thompson, *Moses and the Law*, p. 75. See also, B. S. Childs, 'Wellhausen in English', in D. A. Knight, *Wellhausen and the Prolegomena to the History of Israel, Semia 25*, Scholars Press, (1988), 82-88, especially p. 84. Childs states that Gladstone's letter typifies English distrust of German theological scholarship.

<sup>146</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, pp. 180-81.



nation builder. The Exodus, the conquest of Palestine and the foundations of civil and religious institutions constitute a *trinoda necessitas*, "a three fold combination of fact, which, in order to supply a rational connection between the causes and effects, require not only a Moses, but such a Moses as the Scripture supplies".<sup>147</sup>

The simple fact of the survival of the Hebrews, "a people of limited numbers, of no marked political genius, negative and stationary as to literature and art" is proof of a compelling presupposition of an elaborately detailed system of law. So is the idea of a special and particular divine guidance in the person of Moses, so that the mission of the chosen people could progress. The early, and substantially Mosaic, Pentateuch is in "full accordance with the moral exigency of the case and with the laws of historical probability". The opposite Wellhausian hypothesis contravenes the providential government of history.<sup>148</sup>

Gladstone contends that the later monarchical and prophetic periods of Hebrew history was characterised by retrogression, spiritual iniquity and backsliding. It would be absurd to ascribe the composition of the Pentateuch to this and the postexilic period. The Pentateuch is the base of the superstructure of Hebrew faith. Therefore, how would it be possible to have such a solid superstructure if the base below was so rotten? The laws "could only spring from a plant full of vigorous life, not from one comparatively sickly and exhausted".<sup>149</sup>

The Hebrew prophets were the spiritual and moral guardians of the developing faith, and Scripture records instances of their rebuke of priestly power. So why, in the interests of righteousness, did they not condemn the priest code if it was, as Wellhausen argued, an adulterated forgery in the interests of the priestly order? In this case, negative evidence implied a positive answer.<sup>150</sup>

This led to two conclusions:

We have, then, in the historic Moses a great and powerful genius, an organising and constructing mind. Degenerate ages cannot equip and furnish forth illustrious founders, only at the most the names and shadows of them. Moses belongs to a class of nation makers; to a class of men, who have a place by themselves in the history of

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182 and *SPB*, pp. 361-62.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 183-86.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-90.

politics, and who are amongst the rarest of the great phenomena of our race. And he stands in historic harmony with his work.<sup>151</sup>

Even if it could be shown that certain portions of the Pentateuch were in the order of supplemental development, why were these placed under the name and association of Moses if not "because that name had already acquired and consolidated its authority, from it being inseparably attached to the original gift of the law"? For Moses (as in some respects was Homer) was the *apostolos*, a messenger of God to His people. A supplement would, *ipso facto*, necessitate an older, original Mosaic corpus.<sup>152</sup>

Lastly, Gladstone used the existence of the Samaritan Pentateuch as evidence of an early dating, fidelity and Mosaic connection. Thus:

how is it possible to conceive that it should have been held as a Divine work the supreme place in regard of the Samaritans, if, about or near the year 500 BC or, still more, if at the time of Manasseh the seceder [placed by Wellhausen c. 375 BC] it had as a matter of fact, been a recent compilation of their enemies the Jews? Or if it had been regarded as anything less than a record of a great revelation from God, historically known, or at least universally believed, to have come down to them in the shape it held from antiquity?<sup>153</sup>

The Kingdom of Israel must have possessed at the period of the united monarchy some legal code substantially corresponding to that found in the present Pentateuch.<sup>154</sup>

What conclusions can be reached from this examination of Gladstone's defence of the early date, historical veracity and principally Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch?

Firstly, it is unlikely that a confirmed atheist or agnostic would have been convinced by these arguments because they could not have accepted the Christian presuppositions on which they rested. Gladstone's defence seems to have been written for those Christians who were starting to doubt the truth of Scripture and the Creeds because of the negative historical and literary criticism of the Bible (see Chapter Three). It was also aimed at those convinced believers who required a strong and (superficially) positive argument in defence of the Bible against its detractors. Often the critics' objections had been, as Gladstone notes, "raised against this great and acknowledged

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.



treasure of all Christians from within the borders of Christendom itself, and carried on wholly or mainly by those who have passed through the waters of Baptism".<sup>155</sup>

The nature of Gladstone's argument, secondly, typifies one strand of English conservative theological response to the hypotheses of the continental critics such as Wellhausen and Abraham Kuenen. It was one based on an 'English' common sense and inductive philosophy, shunning the metaphysical and historical speculations of the critics. It would be a mistake to think that Gladstone unambiguously and completely rejected the conclusions of the critics. His acceptance of Bleek's supplementary theory demonstrates the opposite. What he rejected was the unwarranted conclusions, and the attempt at an historical reconstruction that went beyond the evidence or that rejected, *a priori*, the idea of divine or preternatural inspiration.

Gladstone presciently realised the need to combat the likes of Wellhausen on general historical grounds because Wellhausen was more of a historian than a theologian. Certainly Wellhausen was far from the predominating influence of Hegelianism in German theology. However, in critical terms, Gladstone's answer was pre-Wellhausen and, consequently, outdated. Within English theology of the 1890s, the works of S. R. Driver and T. K. Cheyne, for example, had superseded it. Thus, Gladstone was handicapped in utilising the theological perspectives of the Old Testament as elements in his defence of its historic reliability and authority. In truth, it is probable that Gladstone only read Wellhausen's mature theory in the first place because of the promptings of Lord Acton.<sup>156</sup> Acton was extremely well read in the latest German scholarship.<sup>157</sup>

It would be gratuitous to criticise Gladstone too strongly. He was not a Biblical critic or a professional theologian, and had little knowledge of ancient Hebrew. Nonetheless, it would be equally misguided to think that both contemporaries and later scholars have ignored his views.<sup>158</sup> On the surface Gladstone appears more guarded and conservative in his Pentateuchal studies than in his views on divine inspiration. Whilst it is true that much of his reading was on the conservative side, his *Impregnable Rock of Holy*

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<sup>155</sup> Gladstone, *SPB*, p. 354.

<sup>156</sup> GP Add Mss 44094, ff. 39-40, 3 December 1888, Acton to Gladstone.

<sup>157</sup> Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, pp. 175-80. He notes how Acton, when Regius Professor at Cambridge, could hold his own in argument with the foremost British Old Testament critic of the time, William Robertson Smith.

<sup>158</sup> Contemporary theologians, for example, who praised Gladstone included: MacColl, GP Add Mss 44245, ff. 187-88, 9 August 1895, H. P. Liddon, GP Add Mss 44237, ff. 181-82, 25 March 1890 and E. H. Plumptre, GP Add Mss 44510, ff. 228-29, 14 August 1890; and J. J. Lias GGP, 1649, 25 January 1892. Modern secondary works that list Gladstone as an authority on the Bible include, Childs, *Wellhausen in English*, p. 84, Thompson, *Moses and the Law*, pp. 9-10 and Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and the Higher Criticism*, pp. 29, 47 and 196.



*Scripture and General Introduction to Sheppard's Pictorial Bible* are far from being reactionary and backward looking. If his scholarship was hardly radical and up to date, the very act of engaging with and accepting some of the conclusions of the critics, when on the grounds of reason and probability it was safe to do so, demonstrated a move towards a more liberal, if not wholly liberal, stance on Biblical criticism. Thus, reason was integrated with faith in the Gladstone's engagement with Pentateuchal criticism.

### Conclusion.

The topic of Biblical criticism was for Gladstone one that had to be conducted with great caution. Privately, he sounded out the opinions of the acknowledged English experts in the field. Publicly, he was prepared to endorse the ideas and critical research of S. R. Driver, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford.<sup>159</sup> Nevertheless, a conservative critic was cited by Gladstone to sound a note of warning for those trying to understand the latest critical scholarship from the viewpoint of the non-specialist.<sup>160</sup> This was to highlight that, as Gladstone saw it, the critics themselves were divided and produced precipitate, contradictory and unsubstantiated theories.

Gladstone had written to Lord Acton in January 1889 on the subject of scriptural criticism that his mind was always driven back to the parallel question about Homer.<sup>161</sup> Here he had found the critics "a soulless lot". He pointed out that they no longer held the field uncontested, a situation to which he had done much to contribute by his scholarly endeavours.<sup>162</sup> Homeric critics and "Old Testament destructives" shared many of the same faults. These included a tendency to "the levity, the precipitancy, and shallowness of mind, which they display". Even the constructive aspect of the critics' work "seems to be sadly wanting in the elements of rational probability".<sup>163</sup>

In that case Bebbington is correct to point out, " He [Gladstone] saw *The Impregnable Rock* as an exercise in Butlerian apologetic".<sup>164</sup> This is equally applicable as an epitaph to Gladstone's work on inspiration. The fact that inspiration was 'sufficient' underpinned the idea that revelation was to be believed both as reasonable and highly probable. At this point faith took over. By the 1890s it has been shown that Gladstone

<sup>159</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 13, referring to *Contemporary Review*, (February 1890), 215-31.

<sup>160</sup> Gladstone, *IR*, p. 170, referring to Alfred Cave in the *Contemporary Review*, (April 1890), 537-51.

<sup>161</sup> Gladstone to Acton, 23 January 1889, in Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 116.

<sup>162</sup> Gladstone to Acton, n. d., ca. 1889, in Lathbury, *Correspondence*, Vol. II, p. 119.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 243.



moved towards a 'Liberal-Catholic' position in both his ideas on inspiration and his cautious acceptance of Biblical criticism as compatible with a firm belief in dogma. This was a position gradually worked out in his mind, although one that enlarged upon an already openly enquiring mind, as the two short memoranda at the beginning of this chapter show. This chapter shows Gladstone's apologetic was flexible enough to operate on different levels - the degree of intensity being more conservatively inclined on criticism than inspiration. This was part of a common frame of mind, charted throughout this study that can be labelled, for convenience, as 'liberal-conservative' in theology as well as politics.

Appendix. Gladstone and the Reading of *Essays and Reviews*.

The index to the Gladstone diaries records that *Essays and Reviews* were read on 10 May 1860 under the collective term; whilst Temple's essay, *The Education of the World*, was read two days earlier and Jowett's essay *On the Interpretation of Scripture* was read on 2 December 1860. In retrospect this does not appear to have been a significant item of Gladstone's interest in Biblical criticism or his overall theological reading. This contrasts to the notorious celebrity and wide scandal the volume generated within clerical and lay reading of the time. Indeed, in his correspondence with interlocutors beginning with the prosecution of two of the contributors to the collection and the result of the judgement in February 1864, and, later, in the nomination of Frederick Temple to the See of Exeter, Gladstone appeared undisturbed over the furore surrounding both these decisions.

Very little attention has been paid to this and Gladstone wrote and said nothing publicly on the volume in theological terms. According to Lathbury this was because, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Palmerston's government, this would have been politically inexpedient.<sup>165</sup> The edition of *Essays and Reviews* used by Gladstone is still preserved at St. Deiniol's library and his annotations throw an intriguing light on an overlooked but indicative episode in Gladstone's mind.

Peter Hinchliff in his *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* is one of the few scholars to have commented on Gladstone's notes.<sup>166</sup> This refers to the marginalia and handwriting on pages 432-33 of *Essays and Reviews*, specifically the essay by Jowett. Hinchliff viewed these comments as symptomatic of Gladstone's views on Jowett and his liberal theology espoused at the University of Oxford in the 1860s and 1870s.

Indeed, the comments are unreservedly hostile in language and tone. Yet they are almost completely restricted to these two pages. They include the following: where Jowett has written "It throws us back on the conviction that religion is a personal thing, in which certainty is to be slowly won and not assumed as the result of evidence or testimony", the comment in the margin is "This assumes salvation to those who search". On page 433, Jowett states, "Everyone, whether a student of theology or not, has to make

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<sup>165</sup> D. C. Lathbury, *Mr. Gladstone*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>166</sup> P. Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion*, (Oxford, 1986). Note Bebbington, in the *Mind of Gladstone* (p. 131), also accepts this as genuinely Gladstonian.



war against his own prejudices no less than against his passions; and, in the religious teacher, the first is even more necessary than the last". To which is appended the comment, "None more so than the writer of this essay". The comments conclude with the following remarks, "How can we then love the truth who loves not the Lord (of Hosts) [*sic*]...A cold, vain barren philosophy, ending with the grave here. The sport and triumph of devils-hereafter"

Hinchliff takes these to be bona fide comments by Gladstone. However, there are several reasons to cast doubt on this judgement. None of these are in themselves conclusive, but taken together they suggest that we should be cautious of uncritically regarding these remarks as the expressions of Gladstone's considered opinion on Jowett's essay and theology.

The handwriting and style of the annotations on pages 432-33 do not match the genuine Gladstonian marks in the rest of the volume. The remainder of Jowett's essay is not annotated which is puzzling given its length. These pages contain a lot of pencil underlining that is unusual for Gladstone. He has written an index on the flyleaf of the back page of the book (p. 434), and this refers only to marks made in Temple's essay. This corresponds fully with his well-known and recently authenticated method of annotating his books. Furthermore, on pages 29-31 of Temple's essay this different handwriting reappears and is either very faint or rubbed out (see also pp. 7,8, 34-36,40 and 47). On page 47 there occur recognisable Gladstonian annotations, uncharacteristic underlining, faint writing and rubbed out writing.

The strongest reason for maintaining that these are genuine Gladstonian comments is that this volume was Gladstone's private copy, is known to have been annotated by him and there is the diary evidence to say he read Jowett's essay. Why would anyone else write in Gladstone's copy, unless with his permission or after his death?

In his correspondence Gladstone refers to *Essays and Reviews* several times. None ever mention Jowett's essay by name, although there is an allusion to the rest of the essays, bar Temple, in the following letter to G. A. Selwyn, then Bishop of Lichfield:

On some of the papers contained in the volume termed *Essays and Reviews*, I look with a strong aversion. But Dr. Temple's responsibility prior to publication was confined to his own essay. The question whether he ought to have disclaimed or denounced any part of the volume afterwards, is a difficult one, and if it was a duty, it was a duty in regard to which a generous man might well go



wrong. As regards his own essay, I read it at the time of publication, and thought it of little value, but did not perceive that it was mischievous. It has I think received a general acquittal even from the terms usually employed by the assailants of the volume.<sup>167</sup>

The most sustained comment by Gladstone on Jowett appears in a letter written to Pusey on 9 October 1869:

Your matter of fact is this: that Dr Temple was the editor of *Essays and Reviews*. Is this so? It is my duty to use every exertion in my power to inform myself about persons recommended to me for the office of a Bishop. I have not neglected this in the case of Dr Temple and finally, as you know, it is hard to be certain in a negative in a proposition of fact presented for the first time. But your statement is wholly new to me. I had always understood that Mr Jowett was the editor of that book: his essay is by most the longest, besides that it is possessed of what may be called the editor's place at the back of the book.<sup>168</sup>

Unlike Temple's, Jowett's essay, although noted, does not appear to have made the same impression upon Gladstone's mind. The comments quoted by Hinchliff seem to tie in with the rest of Gladstone's views on liberal protestant theology. In spite of this, there is enough countervailing evidence to cast doubt upon their genuineness and to put forward the view that these are later, spurious, additions. The comments, then, do not reflect Gladstone's view. If so then *Essays and Reviews* made no significant or lasting impact upon Gladstone's mind as did Strauss' book *The New Faith and the Old* over a decade later, and which Gladstone saw as a much greater threat to Christian apologetics. Consequently, it may be that political expediency was not the sole or even the main reason Gladstone made no public statement over *Essays and Reviews*, in particular no written statement. This could mean that by the 1860s, and even before his split from Oxford in 1865, Gladstone was drifting away from the orbit of High Church theology upheld by such as Pusey.<sup>169</sup> His reading of *Essays and Reviews* may only be a small and circumstantial piece of evidence, but it is suggestive of such a probability.

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<sup>167</sup> GP Add Mss 44299, f. 169, Gladstone to Selwyn, 17 November 1869. Copy.

<sup>168</sup> GP Add Mss 44281, ff. 354-55, Gladstone to Pusey, 9 October 1869, Copy.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, "Dr. Temple is known or certified to be a man of deep personal piety, great ability, great administrative powers and marked habits of conciliation in dealing with men. I have read his printed sermons (and some in MS), the opinions contained are not after my type; but my type ought not to be the measure of Episcopal appointments. They are not such opinions I should venture to proscribe: I doubt even whether they are such as you would. I cannot therefore, and I do not, shelter myself under any other plea that I am not at present free: nor under that of



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representative or 'dual sections'" See also, Gladstone to Pusey, 10 October 1869, *Pusey Papers*, "Dr. Temple simply sent an essay, which he had previously preached in nearly the same form in Oxford without attracting attention".

## CONCLUSION: GLADSTONE'S UNAPOLOGETIC APOLOGETICS.

To uphold the 'integrity' of Christian dogma was 'perhaps the noblest of all the tasks which it is given the human mind to pursue', because it constituted the 'guardianship of the great fountain of human hope, happiness and virtue'.

Gladstone, *The Church of England and Ritualism*, 1875, p. 52.<sup>1</sup>

In the most recent full-length study of Gladstone it has been argued that his mature political thought was deeply ambiguous, fluctuating in loyalty between the community and the individual. Within the political mind of Gladstone, furthermore, traditional elements in his intellectual make up were the fruit of more radical impulses.<sup>2</sup> This study has sought to revise these conclusions when applied to Gladstone's mature Christian apologetics. In this respect any development in Gladstone towards the adoption of a liberalising trend in theology was in support of defending a conservative, if broad-minded, view of belief and culture. Whilst the specific application of Gladstone's apologetic varied according to the subject under scrutiny, overall it reflected a rational and coherent framework worked out through a series of encounters with people, events and ideas.

The findings of this study register in three broad areas: the nature and chronology of Gladstone's later apologetics, its underlying framework and the application of this to Gladstone's wider views.

In terms of Gladstone's overall theological development his mature position is seen as Liberal Catholicism. This was a development, but not a complete renunciation, of his earlier pre-tractarian high churchmanship. The importance of incarnationism and the ideas of probability, sufficiency, analogy and reserve were the key to this development. The decisive period in the formation of this mature position was from the mid-1860s to the late-1870s. It was during this time that he worked out largely by private reading, correspondence and memoranda his informed theoretical position. This apologetic was applied with varying degrees of intensity during the remainder of his public and private engagements in the reasoned defence of Christianity. Although this position was still capable of minor development or modification (such as in the debate on future life), Gladstone's later apologetic was consistent and not

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in J. Parry, *Democracy and Religion. Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875*, (Cambridge, 1986), p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, pp. 268 and 302.



contradictory. Such apparent confusion as noted by contemporaries and scholars is largely a result of a failure to see that Gladstone's method was not inflexible but applied at differing levels of exactitude based upon his competency in specific subjects.

It is important to remember that this study has analysed Gladstone's ideas, not his overall religiosity. It is, therefore, not a history of Gladstone's later spirituality. Whilst not primarily engaged in this dimension of his persona, there is enough evidence presented in this thesis to counter one historian's claim that the complete nature of Gladstone's religion will remain unfathomable.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, this study should also be viewed in relation to recent advances in Gladstone studies and the nature of Victorian apologetics.<sup>4</sup>

In unpublished research, Ruth Clayton has reflected on the duality between Gladstone's overarching moral conservatism and his pragmatic flexibility in relation to Christian belief. She views this as reflective of Gladstone's mature theological liberalism.<sup>5</sup> Timothy Larsen rightly points out that historians have largely ignored the entire field of Victorian apologetics. He comments that this "has left a regrettable gap in our understanding of religious and intellectual currents in the nineteenth century".<sup>6</sup>

Whereas Clayton has argued that the false polarity in Gladstone is based on an erroneous assumption that moral conservatism and theological liberalism are mutually exclusive, this study recognises, but qualifies, such an approach. This is achieved by stressing the fact that Gladstone's apologetics operated at differing levels of sophistication and success. By concentrating on one of the most strenuous and public apologists of the late-nineteenth century, this thesis contributes to the expansion of our knowledge of Victorian apologetics, which, Larsen argues, is a vital historical undertaking.

A wider range of sources than hitherto used for the study of Gladstone as apologist have been utilised in an attempt at a reconstruction of Gladstone's method.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Lynch, '[Review of Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone, Politics and Religion*, London, 1985]', *Victorian Studies*, 29, (Spring 1986), p. 489.

<sup>4</sup> However, see the thesis by A. Isaba where the link between Gladstone's uses of Christianised Aristotelianism is linked to a spiritual dependence upon, and engagement with, the Italian Medieval poet Dante Alighieri. *Gladstone and Dante: The Place of Dante in the Life and Thought of a Victorian Statesman*, Unpublished Phd Thesis, (University of Keele, 2001), p. 190, for example.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Clayton, '*Enlarging the Text*': A Cultural History of William Ewart Gladstone's Library and Reading, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, (2003), p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> T. Larsen, *Contested Christianity. The Politics and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology*, (Waco, 2004), pp. 113-14.

That is, to try and trace a mind in action. In the formation of these views the use of Gladstone's private memoranda and marginalia emerge as a key (and much neglected) source. The more frequently deployed manuscript and diary evidence in turn supplement these. This attempt (admittedly by the nature of the remaining evidence incomplete) to see how Gladstone himself worked out his position is seen as vital to any consideration of his Christian apologetics.

It is important to be reminded, once again, that Gladstone's final position was the result of a mind in a dialectical relationship and not the result of an accumulation and absorption of new information into a closed mental system. Gladstone's position can be seen as more of a framework than a set of finely articulated doctrines. His position was not isomorphic but fluid. Since this framework was not applied with even results, it is possible to view areas such as the nature of scientific explanation, evolution and the Mosaic cosmogony where this application could appear more conservative than on topics such as the future life and the philosophy of religion. The latter are often taken to reflect a more liberal element to Gladstone's thought. In fact, the same methodological framework was applied in both cases. Where Gladstone lacked specific, detailed and up to date information he was less able to apply the method with precision. This is not to say that he was more conservative because of this, rather that his method was less suited to these areas. Hence contemporaries and historians have incorrectly viewed him to be inconsistent and at times outdated in his defence of Christianity. A lot of the charges of contradiction are equally due to the critics' own presuppositions.

Clayton's research also needs to be taken into account. She has correctly insisted that nineteenth-century High-Church Anglicanism was not as homogenous as was often supposed. Moreover, "liberalising tendencies were not exclusively Broad Church traits: and not all theologians with High-Church credentials reacted negatively to the implications of social and cultural change".<sup>7</sup> As a result of the research undertaken for this thesis I would demur with Clayton's claim that Gladstone's understanding of 'orthodoxy' and 'unorthodoxy' were not clear cut by arguing that whilst it is true his understanding of these terms was not rigid, he did possess a clear dividing line. However, Clayton correctly points out that one should not equate an 'ideal - type' of High-Church theology with the thought of Pusey and Liddon. Indeed, she is right to highlight certain affinities between Gladstone and Broad Church

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<sup>7</sup> Clayton, *Enlarging the Word*, p. 188.



thought and to emphasise that liberalising theological tendencies were not exclusively a Broad Church trait.<sup>8</sup>

On the basis of proposals by Peter Hinchliff to ascertain the extent to which it is possible to define Broad Churchmen, an interesting argument is presented. If the liberal or Broad Church position (although the two are not coterminous) is that all truth originated in God and had a divine character, and that even religious truth could be legitimately subjected to the test of human reason, then it is possible to argue that Gladstone is not ineluctably conservative, but held an essentially liberal position.<sup>9</sup> This is even more suggestive if we view Bishop Butler, as Clayton and Roy Jenkins do, as a Broad Churchman.<sup>10</sup>

Such a view is not unproblematic however. We have seen, throughout this thesis, the extent to which Gladstone relied on the Butlerian method of analogy and probability. There are two ways in which an overall assessment of this can be viewed. The first is the interpretation that such apologetics were fundamentally a *liberal* project.<sup>11</sup> Certainly it is true that the aim of Gladstone's apologetics and epistemology was, as Perry Butler contended, "to seek a *modus vivendi* between the catholic tradition and the liberal principles of the nineteenth century".<sup>12</sup>

However, there is a second interpretation that views the use of "antecedent probability" as a general method used in the mid to late nineteenth century as "characteristically and aggressively opposed to the liberal intellectual spirit of the age".<sup>13</sup> Hence, by the late nineteenth century the use of the Butlerian method by, for example, Newman and Gladstone, can be viewed as "either dangerously ignorant or dangerously reactionary".<sup>14</sup> Thus the view that one takes of Gladstone's apologetics is undoubtedly influenced by the critical presuppositions brought to the analysis by the individual scholar. Complex and complicating as this argument may seem, one should view Gladstone's apologetics, indeed the wider Victorian debate, as an expression of modes of thought and contemplation that emerged from an atmosphere charged with productive tension.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-92.

<sup>9</sup> P. Hinchliff, *God and History. Aspects of British Theology, 1875-1914*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 51 f and 107.

<sup>10</sup> Clayton, *Enlarging the Text*, p. 194 and R. Jenkins, *Gladstone*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-98.

<sup>12</sup> Butler, *Gladstone. Church, State and Tractarianism*, p. 234.

<sup>13</sup> J. Smith, L. I. Berkove and G. A. Baker. 'A Grammar of Dissent: Flatland, Newman and The Theology of Probability', *Victorian Studies*, 39, (Winter 1996), 129-50, p 144.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Therefore, the key to unlock Gladstone's later apologetical framework lies in his continued preoccupation with the nature of intellectual method. It is in the way he worked out a position, rather than his specific conclusions (which as noted varied within a determined range of opinions), that the most significant aspect of his later mind in general is seen to be deployed. Hence, there is the need to revise the overall picture of Gladstone as an intellectual in political and public life. Part one demonstrated how Gladstone laboured in private and in public to reach a mature epistemology. Part two showed how he applied this in a series of controversial debates active amongst the clergy and intelligentsia of later-Victorian Britain.

Gladstone's response highlights a number of more general considerations. One of the most important, and certainly one of the most neglected topics, is the importance of the statesman's relationship to the more general nineteenth century English debate between the merits of empiricism and idealism. Nearly thirty years ago, in a pioneering analysis of Gladstone's 'Vaticanism' controversy, H. C. G. Matthew noted that from the beginning of Gladstone's Church-State studies there remained "a persistent ambivalence between idealism and empiricism, an ambivalence which remained with Gladstone throughout his life".<sup>15</sup>

This study by reaffirming the central significance of a method consistent with the thought of Aristotle and Bishop Joseph Butler, together with highlighting Gladstone's dislike of much contemporary Christian apologetic, has thrown more light on the debate on the relationship between Christianity and idealism in late-Victorian Britain.<sup>16</sup>

Gladstone's position was thoroughly inductivist and decidedly anti-empiricist. This did not preclude the use of empirical methods, of course, but Gladstone rejected the tradition of Lockean empiricism as the sole means of epistemology. However, he did not completely reject idealist concepts of thinking and was capable of incorporating these into his framework. The significance is that from the 1850s he chose to reject the emerging English idealist philosophy where this was heavily reliant upon Hegelianism. Nevertheless, Gladstone's position fitted in with the prevailing late-Victorian idealist *zeitgeist*, if one accepts the account of it given by F. M. Turner,

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<sup>15</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Vaticanism and the Question of the East', in D. Baker, (ed.) *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian*, Studies in Church History, (Oxford, 1978), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> For recent developments see, T. M. Gouldstone, *The Rise and Decline of Anglican Idealism in the Nineteenth Century*, (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 27 f; F. M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority. Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life*, (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 322-24.



and the 'unreflective moral Kantianism' that permeated intellectual discussion as postulated by S. Collini.<sup>17</sup>

Turner has argued that a broader late nineteenth-century idealism pervaded British intellectual culture which "represented an outlook that emphasised metaphysical questions in philosophy, historicist analysis of the past, the spiritual character of the world, the active powers of the human mind, intuitionism, subjective religiosity, the responsibility of individuals for the undertaking of moral choice and action, the relative or even absolute importance of communities and communal institutions over individual action or human rights, and the shallowness of any mode of reductionist thought".<sup>18</sup> Due qualification would have to be given by stating that Gladstone did not uphold subjective religiosity or a full acceptance of historicism, but there is enough common ground to make the comparison plausible.

This is not to say that Gladstone was a philosophical idealist. He was not, certainly not in the sense usually applied to the term associated with the philosophies of T. H. Green, F. H. Bradley and E. Caird. Nonetheless Gladstone's position was compatible with certain broad trends associated with the religious impact of idealism. For example, W. R. Ward in an article on *Oxford and the Origins of Liberal Catholicism in the Church of England*, highlighted the fundamental difference between an older tractarian, conservative and deductive based theology and the emerging Anglo-Catholic idealist, inductive theology that was most prominent in the theology associated with the *Lux Mundi* group. As we have seen, Gladstone thought highly of Charles Gore, editor and contributor to *Lux Mundi*, and prominent Anglo-Catholic theologian.<sup>19</sup> Ruth Clayton has shown strong links existed between Gladstone and Edward Talbot (Warden of Keble College, Oxford and fellow *Lux Mundi* contributor).<sup>20</sup>

Gore's Anglo-Catholic idealist influenced theology may not have been the whole attraction to Gladstone in his qualified endorsement of the newer generation emerging from Oxford. Yet it is revealing when set against the reaction of another conservatively minded High Churchman, Lord Salisbury. Like Gladstone, Salisbury was a strong incarnationalist and had been influenced by Tractarian spirituality. Still, a number of scholars have remarked upon the empiricist basis of his thought, and his

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*. See also, S. Collini, *Public Moralists. Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930*, (Oxford, 1991), p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, p. 322.

<sup>19</sup> W. R. Ward, 'Oxford and the Origins of Liberal Catholicism in the Church of England', in C. W. Dugmore (ed.), *Studies in Church History*, 1, (Oxford, 1964), pp. 233-52.

<sup>20</sup> Clayton, *Enlarging the Word*, pp. 199-217.

utilitarian anti-idealism. Therefore, although Salisbury and Gladstone both shared the same High Church predilections, Salisbury's empiricist anti-metaphysical outlook led him to regard unfavourably the theology associated with *Lux Mundi*. For Gladstone Gore's contribution had been 'masterly'. Whereas, in contrast, for Salisbury the book was dismissed as 'an inverted pyramid of argument'.<sup>21</sup> Again this is not to reduce religious conviction or preference to philosophical outlook, but the contrast is revealing and indicative.

This study has repeatedly emphasised the fact that Gladstone's Christian apologetic bore directly upon his wider social and political views. That is, his broader comments on the nature of politics, government and society which reflected an early Coleridgean interest in the idea of a clerisy. In many ways his defence of Christianity was articulated to inform the wider debate on how a liberal educated clerisy was to enliven the contemporary moral and public climate. His method, thus, was a configuration of Christian apologetics preserving the virtues of Peelite étatist practice with a call for moral and political reform within the élite. Therefore it is far from antiquarian to study his later religious thought as the critical dialectic he formed influenced the entirety of his actions. Whilst Gladstone was keen to be at the forefront of debate (in some cases positing his own original ideas) there were times when he was drawn into, somewhat reluctantly, pre-existing debates.<sup>22</sup>

This demonstrates how his use of Butler and Aristotle, amongst others, to ascertain the correct relationship between faith and reason, and the rejection of unwarranted and unjustifiable theological speculation, revealed a set of mental attitudes of wider significance. In Gladstone's mind faith and reason and Christianity and society were intimately connected. In 1865 Gladstone addressed an academic audience with *On the Place of Ancient Greece in the Providential Order of the World*. Contemporary society was one in which rationalism, materialism, determinism and other such 'fancies' made the situation (echoing St. Augustine) 'critical and

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<sup>21</sup> Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, Volume One 1830-1868, (London, 1921), p. 107 and 'Lord Salisbury in Private Life', in R. Blake and H. Cecil (eds.), *Salisbury: The Man and His Politics*, (Basingstoke, 1987), p. 42. See also, M. Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World. Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 127.

<sup>22</sup> See Liverpool Address 1872, Glasgow Rectoral Address 1879, articles on Robert Elsmere and Ingersoll 1888 and Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture 1890.



formidable'.<sup>23</sup> In this condition "the power of putting questions runs greatly in advance of the pains to answer them". What must be avoided was the "error...of seeking to cherish a Christianity of isolation". This religion "must be filled with human and genial warmth, in close sympathy with every true instinct and need of man, regardful of the just titles of every faculty of his nature, which goes to enrich and enlarge the patrimony of the race".<sup>24</sup>

Such strictures as applied to Christianity applied equally *mutatis mutandis* to society and politics. For Gladstone materialism and positivism, selfishness and scientism, the interest of the whole community or all believers versus sectional or class interests, and equilibrium and reserve versus excess were all part of the same problem. In theology Gladstone would uphold *securus judicat orbis terrarum* and in politics he would stress a cognisant emphasis on a moralised, independent and self-reliant citizenry rising above narrow and selfish pursuits. The clerisy, for Gladstone, was the rule of a community of people of conservative but adaptable views, often independent of established institutional structures, that sought to prevent the undermining of the practical accumulated wisdom of Christianity.

Take, for instance, Gladstone addressing an audience at Keble College in April 1878:

It has been truly said that this is a college for special purposes...[t]here would, in my opinion, be no greater calamity than that we should see formed in Oxford any new college characterised by fanciful peculiarities, or any new college open...to the charge of being sectarian.<sup>25</sup>

For Gladstone, religion was the "groundwork and centre" of all thought and activity, especially that associated with advancing the development of human nature, whether such development was primarily sacred or not.<sup>26</sup>

This reasoning had a powerful appeal for Gladstone because he used the same argument on a number of occasions. The same message as outlined to the

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<sup>23</sup> W. E. Gladstone, *Address on the Place of Ancient Greece in the Providential Order of the World. Delivered Before the University of Edinburgh on the Third of November 1865*, Second edition, (London, 1865), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> See Clayton, *Enlarging the Word*, p. 213. The full text of the speech appeared in *The Guardian*, 1 May 1878, p. 613.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

intelligentsia at Oxford was relayed to a deputation of Leeds, Huddersfield and West Yorkshire Liberals in 1895. There was no antagonism, Gladstone expounded, between divine and human learning.<sup>27</sup> At the opening of a new library at the national Liberal Club in 1888, Gladstone had commented:

I am very far from saying that any intellectual process whatever will satisfy all the needs and wants of the human spirit, but I may add that they are full of noble elements and they are a necessary condition of every wholesome struggle to resist the invasions of the more worldly mind and habit of life, and to enable us to hold our ground against the incessant and constantly growing hurry and excitement that are around us and that carry us into the vortex from which we cannot escape.<sup>28</sup>

The important question related to whether the modified Coleridgean clerisy was doing its duty? In 1887, commenting upon a new edition of Lord Tennyson's poem, *Locksley Hall*, Gladstone remained optimistic; confident of

a silent but more extensive and practical acknowledgement of the great second commandment, of the duties of wealth to poverty, of strength to weakness, of knowledge to ignorance in a word of man to man. And the sum of the matter seems to be that upon the whole, and in a degree, we who have lived fifty, sixty, seventy years back, and are living now, have lived into a gentler time; that the public conscience has grown more tender, as indeed was very needful; and that, in the matters of practice, at sight of evils formerly regarded with indifference or even connivance, it now not only winces but rebels: that upon the whole the race has been reaping, and not scattering; earning, and not wasting.<sup>29</sup>

Even here, however, a note of caution is sounded: "Each generation or age is under a twofold temptation: the one to overrate its own performances, the other to undervalue the times preceding or following its own. No greater calamity can happen to a people than to break utterly with its past".<sup>30</sup> In regard to the United Kingdom that past was, for Gladstone, overwhelmingly Christian. As the preceding chapters have

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<sup>27</sup> See *The Times*, 16 April 1895, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> See *The Times*, 3 May 1888, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> W. E. Gladstone, "'Locksley Hall' and the Jubilee", *The Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXI, No. CXIX, (January 1887), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.



demonstrated Gladstone's skirmishes over science, unbelief, future life and revelation were part of an overall strategy. That strategy was aimed at preserving and where possible and practicable strengthening the citadel of belief from internal and external threats. Peter Erb and David Bebbington have shown how the influence of the German liberal Catholicism of Johann A. Möhler reinforced in the mind of Gladstone the idea that the consensus of orthodox Christians in key doctrines provided a powerful apologetic tool, to which chapter two also referred.<sup>31</sup>

This was part of a wider strategy in upholding the unity of faith and reason against the disintegrating tendencies of specialisation emerging in the professional and academic world of the late nineteenth century. Unlike in the thought of Matthew Arnold, the idea of culture against anarchy was no substitute for religion in the mind of Gladstone.

It should be noted, as Ruth Clayton has done in an article on St. Deiniol's library, that Gladstone approved of Arnold's suggestion of "culture as the great help out of our present difficulties [...] turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our [...] notions and habits".<sup>32</sup> The contrast with Arnold is useful. Arnold's praise for Sophocles echoed Gladstone's praise of Bishop Butler: both men strove for wholeness and broadness of view. Both Gladstone and Arnold shared a dialectical method of reasoning and apologetic aims. That is, for both men, frame of mind was more important than the conclusions to which it led. However, both had fundamentally different ideas when it came to implementing their framework.<sup>33</sup>

This reflects a view of Gladstone as sharing with Arnold and Newman, for example, the idea of the sage or prophetic man of letters, even though all three authors' primary interest lay elsewhere. T. W. Heyck has claimed that from the 1860s theology ceased to be the umbrella for all branches of knowledge. The emergence of positivistic science as a way of thinking would ultimately destroy the cultural hegemony of the man of letters.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, this study has demonstrated that

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<sup>31</sup> Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 310 and P. C. Erb, 'Gladstone and German Liberal Catholicism', *Recusant History*, Volume 23, Part 3, (1997), 450-69.

<sup>32</sup> Taken from Gladstone's copy of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy. An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, (London, 1869), p. viii, preface. Quoted in R. Clayton, 'Masses or Classes?: The Question of Community in the Foundation of Gladstone's Library', *Library History*, Vol. 19, (November 2003), p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> S. Collini, *Matthew Arnold. A Critical Portrait*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 80, 84, 87, and 94. See also, J. Holloway, *The Victorian Sage. Studies in Argument*, (New York, 1965), p. 203.

<sup>34</sup> T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian Britain*, (London, 1982), pp. 84 and 86.

Gladstone could still speak out with some success. The kind of intellectual authority and space represented by people like him, and the Christianised clerisy he advocated, was not so interstitial as to have totally collapsed in an era of supposed professionalisation.<sup>35</sup> Roy MacCleod pointed out over thirty years ago that historians should be on guard against such whiggish assumptions when discussing the general place of science in late nineteenth-century society.<sup>36</sup>

The Christian impulse behind much of Gladstone's later attempt at the re-moralisation of politics in the 1880s and beyond finds an excellent reference in his note to Bishop Butler's sermon *Upon Human Nature*. Butler stressed the idea of Christian corporatism in the New Testament by citing Romans 12: 4-5, all are one body in Christ. In a footnote Gladstone commented,

Our nature as a whole proves that each part of a body has a function for itself and has also an office to discharge on behalf of the body to which it belongs, so every member of society or incorporation has to discharge in it duties to himself and other duties to the association.<sup>37</sup>

Gladstone evokes the wisdom of Aristotle and Cicero to reinforce the point.<sup>38</sup>

H. C. G. Matthew has argued that this reflected a tacit acceptance of the secular agenda in politics as evidenced by the Midlothian campaign. The weight given to morality, common humanity and humanitarianism is seen by Matthew as Gladstone's reluctant recognition that religion was becoming a private and discrete affair. The political campaign to re-energise a morally based politics was an acknowledgement that intellectually and culturally Christianity, particularly the Anglican Church, had lost the initiative.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed it is true, as Matthew also stressed, that Gladstone did not share the political, economic and cultural pessimism that particularly affected the secular liberal intelligentsia from the 1860s.<sup>40</sup> However, it is argued in this study that Gladstone's Christian apologetics was a public attempt by the statesman to reinvigorate all areas of

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<sup>35</sup> See, J. M. Guy, 'Specialisation and Social Utility: Disciplining English Studies', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 199-217, p. 212.

<sup>36</sup> R. M. Macleod, 'Resources of Science in Victorian England: the Endowment of Science Movement, 1868-1900', in P. Mathias (ed.), *Science and Society 1600-1900*, (Cambridge, 1972), 111-166, p.112.

<sup>37</sup> Gladstone, *WJB, II*, Sermons, p. 34 note.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, vii, 6 and Cicero, *De Officiis*, i, 3

<sup>39</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809-1898*, (Oxford, 1997), pp. 294-95.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.



life and not just theology. Gladstone's epistemology rejected positivistic conceptions of knowledge as the only legitimate basis for a rational and educated society. In debate with Sir James Fitzjames Stephen and Thomas Henry Huxley, Gladstone operated from clearly Christian impulses. These men represented the kind of clerisy Gladstone wished to avoid. In the general battle to shape culture, Christianity was for Gladstone never simply a private and discrete motive power, however much the vocabulary of its expression may have been accommodated to a wider audience.

This is made clear in the foundation of St. Deiniol's library, which Ruth Clayton has called Gladstone's "personal contribution to the Liberal Catholic movement within Anglicanism".<sup>41</sup> As Clayton says: "Gladstone established a library in which an impressive theological collection was housed alongside secular subjects, principally history, with the hope that visiting readers [intended by Gladstone to be mainly local and national clergy] would exploit the fertile links between them and succeed in making theology, threatened with demotion in the universities and marginalisation in modern life, a relevant and vigorous subject once more".<sup>42</sup>

In 1859, at the beginning of the period of this study, Gladstone held to a similar view to those men of letters and others of the clerisy, such as Tennyson, who stressed the need to broaden the mind. Those charged with forming opinion and upholding a Christian and universal code of life ought to be self-critical, prepared to both learn and un-learn. The formation of mind and character was one of the highest endeavours entrusted to humanity by providence. The danger was, as in Tennyson's poem *Maud* [or more generally in the Laureate's preference for airy theory over evidence], to make "suggestive [i.e. partial] representations of even the more practical and narrow aspects of some endangered truth".<sup>43</sup>

Frank Turner, for example, has shown in a seminal piece of research, how epistemological differences over the role of theology as an intellectual authority and cultural arbiter was the core of the contemporary science versus religion debate. In this sense Gladstone, whose self-conscious acknowledgement of his weakness in the technicalities of scientific discourse, could make up some ground lost to his specific dicta in a wider appeal to the lessons to be learned from the epistemological debate. The result of the nascent professionalisation of science in the last decades of the reign

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<sup>41</sup> Clayton, 'Masses or Classes?' p. 169.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Gladstone, 'Tennyson', *Gleanings*, Volume Two, Personal and Literary, pp. 143 and 177. The original article had appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, (October 1859).

of Victoria led to a perceived recognition amongst the cognoscenti of a rise in authority and prestige in favour of science over religion. Scientists such as Huxley and John Tyndall and wider cultural commentators, such as Leslie Stephen and his lawyer brother James, argued that positivistic epistemology was the only legitimate foundation for science and the correct model for knowledge in general. This was almost a spiritual crusade for a rational, non-idealist, anti-metaphysical and aggressively secular worldview.<sup>44</sup>

Gladstone was outraged that equation of true knowledge with positivistic definitions led to the evils of unbelief and amongst the intelligentsia a noted unionist political preference. Thus the debates with Huxley over the Mosaic Cosmogony and the Gadarene swine, with Ingersoll over the morality of revelation, and Fitzjames Stephen on the question of authority were part of Gladstone's response. This was his attempt to preserve the educative influence and social hegemony that the idea of a Christian clerisy implied, and a plea on behalf of liberal, non-specialised, education in general.

Gladstone was not alone in this aim. Lord Salisbury, for example, wrote to Professor Herbert Mcleod in 1883 arguing that an informed interest in science was not automatically a case for the discrediting of Christianity: "I think that even the indifferent part of the world is getting tired of the impudent pretensions of the Atheists".<sup>45</sup> Much more to Salisbury's preference (and Gladstone's) was the scientist Henry Wentworth Acland because he was as "harmless...[a] sort of scientific man as you can have...he is intensely Oxford in all his thoughts & objects".<sup>46</sup> Bernard Lightman has studied the general periodical response to John Tyndall's 1874 Belfast Address. The agnostic Tyndall, delivering the Presidential Address of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, espoused a belief in the "higher materialism" as the true key to knowledge. Gladstone's response to scientism finds an echo in Lightman's study, and shows that the statesman was not alone in wishing to defend Christianity as the cornerstone of the cultural elite. Lightman concludes, "after Belfast, the periodical press became a significant site of resistance to the cultural authority of scientific naturalists, part of a growing disillusionment with the attempts

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<sup>44</sup> Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority*, pp. 173-82.

<sup>45</sup> E. D. Steele, 'Salisbury and the Church', in Blake and Cecil (eds.), *Salisbury: The Man and His Politics*, pp. 194 and 214.

<sup>46</sup> Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World*, p. 131.



of Tyndall and his allies to dominate science, and through it, the fate of British society".<sup>47</sup>

In contrast Gladstone advanced the Christian merits of all ratiocination by favouring the Christian application of Aristotelianism and Butlerianism and reliance upon certain authors and works that tended, in his opinion at least, to reaffirm and revitalise these philosophies. At times this served to undermine his apologetics because Gladstone was in some cases an imprudent participant in public debates on science and biblical criticism. This revealed him most exposed in the application of his general method. It was less suited, and less developed in Gladstone's mind, to areas of knowledge in which he lacked any kind of technical expertise and sympathy.

If not a theological radical Gladstone was no inflexible or obscurantist conservative either. Indeed, given that he read widely, and works of greatly differing opinions, he became more tolerant and less hidebound in his ways of thinking as time went by. For example, the practical significance of incarnationism in Gladstone's mature thought bore fruit in a sympathetic, and on the whole positive, review of a classic of Broad Church scholarship, *Ecce Homo*. This does not mean Gladstone remotely supported latitudinarian or neologian theology, nor that he accepted their presuppositions. What it does reveal is that a strain of theological liberalism could co-exist in Gladstone's mind with the maintenance of an orthodox Catholic doctrinal legacy.

The acceptance of a limited and clearly circumscribed form of doctrinal development, a progressive view of revelation, a version of theistic evolution, and a consideration of the claims of conditional immortality all point to an open-minded religion, untouched by party factionalism. It also shows that by the 1870s this was a firmly Catholic and patristically based Christianity. Whatever the earlier significance of evangelicalism had been on Gladstone, it was now firmly but gently subsumed within this framework. In all of this Gladstone was attempting to bolster traditional Anglican atonement-based theology through inductivist metaphysics. This was not a belief handicapped by too rigid an adherence to received Anglican or Catholic doctrine.

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<sup>47</sup> B. Lightman, 'Scientists as Materialists in the Periodical Press: Tyndall's Belfast Address', in G. Cantor and S. Shuttleworth (eds.), *Science Serialized. Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004), p. 230. See also Macleod, 'Resources of Science in Victorian England', pp. 151-52.

Overall this study has shown that Gladstone's later apologetic was flexible enough to operate at different degrees of intensity and to understand the varying chronology of his modes of engagement. In this respect it emphasises that Gladstone did not operate in largely separate political and religio-philosophical spheres. Hence his later theological views have a greater relevance to his wider political and cultural interests than biographies by Richard Shannon and Roy Jenkins, and even Matthew, allow. Any liberalising trends in Gladstone's later theology should be placed within a broader Peelite political and cultural liberal conservatism. Ultimately this situates Gladstone, within a school of thought regarding his mature position, as still in essentials liberal-conservative, rather than as a statesman prone to adopt increasing radicalism. Neither, however, was Gladstone an unsophisticated or indifferent theologian even if his apologetics did reflect many trends in late-Victorian thought. They may not have been original, but they were a powerful and influential voice in the contemporary debate.



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