

Rhetorics of Belief: Persuasive Style in the Gladstone- Réville-Huxley Debates

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*I*n the six-month period between November 1885 and April 1886 a debate on the rise of religion exploded in the English press. Part of the reason for the wide-spread attention given to the controversy in both England and America was the celebrity of the main opponents: the British Liberal Prime Minister and theologically conservative High Churchman, William E. Gladstone (1809-1898), and the chief proponent of “new science” as a cultural necessity, Thomas H. Huxley (1825-1895). The controversy faded quickly, although it smoldered for several years, before erupting once more in 1890/1891, thereafter dying from sight for almost a century. Later billed as “The Conflict between Genesis and Geology,”¹ contemporary readings of the event have continued to view it in this light. Thus, in 1988, following the American Supreme Court decision on “creation science,” Stephen Jay Gould, attempted to make a sort of centenary project of the controversy in an article in *Natural History* entitled “Genesis and Geology: Are you interested in the rock of ages or the age of rocks?”²

Gould’s piece was to put an end to the issue supposedly central to the nineteenth-century debate (just as the Supreme Court had a year earlier), but his article, along with the comments of a surprising number of contemporary writers on Gladstone’s work,³ raises a major problem: when one goes to the debate texts themselves, one discovers that the controversy was rooted not in post-“Scopes Trial” questions concerning the

historicity of Genesis or geological truth, but rather in nineteenth-century theories on “primitive revelation,” the birth and historical rise of religion, and, by implication, the birth and development of religious sensibility in the individual.⁴ Gladstone was a much more sophisticated thinker than he is often given credit for, much more than a mere “political animal,” the ambitious manipulator of power on the one hand and the humble theologian on the other, and, albeit his political instincts were never far from his core and at times confuse his argument, he was a man clearly aware of his prime theological opponents.

The central figure that initiated this controversy, however, was not Huxley, Darwin’s agnostic bulldog, but a French Protestant writer, Albert Réville (1826-1906), well-known in Gladstone’s day and, although now forgotten, a central figure in establishing the liberal religious view that in varying ways shaped the pattern by which the Darwinian schema would be assimilated within the Christian world thereafter. The following article is directed to the debate between Gladstone and Huxley, Gladstone’s transition from Réville’s article to Huxley, and the implications for the ongoing debate between Gladstone and Huxley, and science and religion.

The Origins of the Debate

In 1884, following its publication in France, an English translation of Réville’s *Prolégomènes de l’Histoire des Religions* (Paris, 1881) appeared with a laudatory introduction by the popular religious studies scholar, F. Max Müller (1823-1900), entitled *Prolegomena of the History of Religions*, translated by A.S. Squire (London: Williams and Northgate, 1884). The piece contained a fairly lengthy attack on Gladstone’s approach to religion, but the latter appears not to have read it in French (the third edition of 1884) until July of the year following. In September he went to work on the English version with his usual acumen directed toward works that attacked him and that he deemed worthy for answer.⁵

Although no longer a household name in religious studies, Réville was then well known. His christological studies – which rejected the di-

vinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity – appeared in English translation in 1876 (revised 1878), and in 1884, the same year that the translation of the *Prolegomena* appeared, he delivered the prestigious Hibbert Lectures, choosing as his topic the pre-conquest religions of Mexico and Peru.⁶ A French Unitarian, born in 1826, Réville had studied at the universities of Geneva and Strasbourg before taking up pastoral charges at Nîmes, Luneray, and Rotterdam. In 1880 he was appointed professor of the history of religions in the Collège de France and in 1886, on the suppression of the Catholic faculties of theology in the *Ecole pratique des hautes études* a year earlier, he was appointed to head the “fifth” section in the *Ecole*, devoted to Religious Sciences, which had installed itself in the buildings formerly occupied by the Catholic theologians.

Réville’s *Prolegomena* remains an interesting work, raising as it does a great many issues in the study of religion that it is not possible to pursue in this paper.⁷ Réville was not in any sense anti-religious. For him “man” is an essentially religious creature and has been so since his earliest evolutionary stage. “I place religion itself, as a faculty, an attribute, a tendency, natural to the human mind, above all the forms, even the most exalted, which it has assumed in time and space” (5-6)⁸ he writes in his Hibbert lectures. Even if humanity as it presently exists is the result of polygenetic origins, man is a unity:

That the roots of religion pierce to the very cradles of humanity, may now be taken as demonstrated. Its principle is found in the necessity we feel of surmounting the uncertainties and limitations of destiny, by attaching ourselves individually to the loftier Spirit revealed by nature outside and within; and this principle has always remained the same. (252)

Human nature, thus, is in every way “natural.”

[The history of religions] teaches us that there is a principle, bordering closely upon that of religion itself, which must serve as the torch to guide the religious idea

in its development – not to supplant it, but to direct its true path. It is the principle of humanity. The truer a religion is, the more absolute the homage it will render to the principle of humanity, and the more will he who lives by its light feel himself impelled to goodness, loving and loved, trustful and free. The last word of religious history is, that there exists an affinity, a mysterious relationship, between our spirit and the Spirit of the universe; that this nobility of human nature embraces in itself all the promises, all the hopes, all the latent perfections, all the infinite ideals of the future; that in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the Supreme Will is good to each one of the beings which it summons and draws to itself; and that man, in spite of his errors, his failures, his corruptions, his miseries, was never wrong in following the sacred instinct that raised him slowly from the mire, was always right in renewing his efforts ... to mount the rounds de cette échelle d'or qui va se perdre en Dieu. (254-55)⁹

Let no one suggest, however, Réville insists, that the religious drive to the ultimate is infused or inculcated from outside the “nature” of man. It is what man is, and is discoverable in the “strictly scientific” analysis of the human nature as it exists in individuals and in their historical progression. Any other suggestion is destructive of the nobility of human nature, particularly any paternalistic demand that man requires something other than he is in himself, namely a revelation. Not surprisingly, as a result, immediately following his early definition of religion in the *Prolegomena*, Réville turns to attack all theologies which propose “primitive revelation,” and chooses as his primary targets, the conservative French Catholic traditionalist, Louis de Bonald (1754-1840), and William E. Gladstone.

Réville's choice of Bonald is obvious, but that of Gladstone may surprise early twenty-first century readers, who tend to think of the latter

primarily as a "Liberal" politician. Certainly Gladstone's political prominence would have made him attractive as an opponent. But Réville was not the sort to choose straw men to attack. As a politician, and above all as a Liberal of Réville's own political stripe, Gladstone moved many because he was also well-known as an astute literary critic, a near professional Homeric scholar and student of Greek religion (during his life he wrote thirty-five articles and seven books on Homeric subjects alone¹⁰), and a compelling, intelligent, and learned theologian and churchman, albeit one very much the theological and ecclesiological opposite of Réville.

Gladstone and Homer

What caught Réville's attention in Gladstone's first major Homeric study, the three-volume *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age* (1858), was the argument in the second volume which the French scholar outlines:

[M]ythologies are, according to Mr Gladstone, the result of a systematic corruption of earlier doctrines of great sublimity and of great purity. They do not spring, as the modern school teaches, out of the direct deification of natural facts. They are at bottom only the old theistic, Messianic and biblical traditions sophistically re-clothed.... The religion revealed in the beginning contained six great doctrines: 1st, the unity of God; 2nd a divine Trinity, the three terms of which shared in the same dignity; 3rd, the promise of a Redeemer who should deliver man from the curse of sin; 4th, a divine personal Wisdom, creating and sustaining the world; 5th, the connection of the Redeemer with humanity by his miraculous birth of a woman; finally, 6th, the existence of a wicked being, of the *evil one*. (41)

Never one to live quietly, Gladstone took to reading Réville's *Prolegomena* in translation during a brief pause in July 1885,¹¹ having faced

the defeat of his second ministry a month earlier. He had lost his voice but quickly found a cure with electric shock treatment, after which he took a brief holiday tour in August, and then, returning to the problem of Irish Home Rule and entering negotiations with the leader of the Irish National League, Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891), he went on the stump, winning a partial majority for his party in November 1885, before he took office again for a third term as Prime Minister in January of 1886.

Somehow, in the midst of this activity, he found time to reflect on his reply to Réville. Beginning to write in early October,¹² his “The Dawn of Creation and Worship: Reply to Dr. Réville” appeared, following some *Times*’ pre-publication publicity, in the November issue of *The Nineteenth Century*.¹³ His argument was, for once, reasonably direct. Opening with an attack on Réville’s title (the book is not prolegomena, Gladstone argues quite rightly, but epilegomena), Gladstone then goes on to offer a more nuanced version of his position than that offered by Réville, pointing out that he has written much on the subject since his *Studies* thirty years earlier (688) and that his argument is not the simplistic early Christian one according to which the “pure” revelation to the Hebrews was “corrupted” by later traditions (688–89). Moreover, he insists, his argument throughout has been fully based on reason and is, in the best sense, “strictly scientific” and properly “analogous,” designations he will not allow to his opponent, despite the latter’s use of them (686). Réville’s reference to analogy in particular strikes Gladstone since from his publications he had insisted on the importance of the work of Bishop Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* and in keeping with this work that “probability was the guide to life” both in the practical and theoretical spheres.¹⁴

Gladstone is arguing that when comparing the Homeric poems and the Hebrew Scriptures along with other ancient materials, there is a higher probability that their theological and moral frameworks are based on a universal primitive revelation than that such different cultures arrived at strikingly similar findings “by simple reference to a solar theory, or even

to nature-worship in a larger sense" (688). Gladstone is not upholding a notion of a corruption of an earlier, true version of reality. Against what Réville suggests, he insists that he does not maintain any "wilful corruption of a primitive religion," "that all the mythologies are due to any such corruption systematic," that any "part of [these mythologies] sprang out of the deification of natural facts," or that any "ideas conveyed in the Book of Genesis, or in any Hebrew tradition, were developed in the form of dogma, ... as is conceived by Dr. Réville," and in summing up that Gladstone is "so far from ever having held that there was 'a primitive orthodoxy' revealed to the first men" (688-89). For the next ten pages Gladstone maintains his attack on Réville's treatment of Genesis (689-99) before taking up some five pages of particular aspects of Homeric study (699-705) and concluding his study.

Of foremost importance for Gladstone in this argument is a defense of the traditional conservative Christian – by which Gladstone, ever the High Churchman, means the catholic – principle that fallen nature on its own accord cannot merit any salvific results. Grace is necessary for an individual's faith, and a gracious revelation for the faith of humanity as a whole. No individual or race can achieve the heights of religious insight so grandly outlined in Réville's work by nature alone. This is the delusion of Liberal Protestantism and, aside from his political views, Gladstone is no religious Liberal.

And yet, in spite of Gladstone's insistence on the fallenness of human nature, he is far from speaking of human nature as "depraved." There is no place in his system for any gnesio-Lutheran nature/grace oppositions or strict Calvinist doctrines of total depravity. He is no Protestant in this sense. Humanity may be fallen but is good; grace does not overcome nature but perfects it. For Gladstone the doctrine holds true in history, anthropology, and politics. The secular state cannot achieve its ends on its own – True enough, but law is not maintained to hold a fallen world in order until the second coming; rather, grace through law and custom is given to help the state become what it truly can and ought to be. Grace perfects nature.

Working from such a base, Gladstone, like his High Church colleagues, can quite consistently also maintain a high view of human nature. Nature may be fallen, but it is created in the image of God and is thus “good.” Thus, Gladstone is doubly offended by Réville’s suggestion that his English opponent understands Homer as teaching a “corrupted” revelation; Homer, after all, for Gladstone, represents the heights of human thought and poetry. But neither, likewise, does Gladstone need to fret that the Old Testament (no less than Homer) “nods.” “I make no assumption,” he writes, “as to what is termed a verbal inspiration, and of course in admitting the variety [of alternate readings in the Hebrew text] I give up the absolute integrity of the text” (694).

The conclusion of Gladstone’s reply to Réville (705-6) is highly rhetorical from a twenty-first century point of view and for that reason is often omitted from discussions of the piece, but the pattern of so treating the article is problematic in that it is not merely a fashionable summation of his argument, but that in it Gladstone makes his point. That this “point” is made in a “closing” is not to be negated. Gladstone does not (nor, as I shall argue, do Huxley and Réville) side-step formal rhetorical principles in his conclusion. After a brief mention of Genesis in the introduction to this section, Gladstone does not mention that book or the book of revelation again in his conclusion. Genesis is merely “the opening section” of the book of revelation which (revelation, that is, not merely Genesis) “conve[ys] special knowledge to meet the special need everywhere so palpable in the state and history of our race.” Nor does Gladstone raise the issue of “this precious gift” of revelation as solving “all the problems, either insoluble or unsolved” of “the mystery of all this unintelligible world” (using two of Wordsworth’s lines¹⁵). “Either insoluble or unsolved,” “the conception of a deity, an acting and a ruling deity,” it is Gladstone’s contention, has been cast aside on a three-fold proposition, each of which does not prove the “conception,” but in the scope of *human* proceedings (“in the light of truth” [reason] and “the accumulated testimony of man ... and his wisdom” [history]) ought “at least [by] the decencies of mourning would be vouchsafed to this irrepa-

rable loss"). Instead, reason and history according to Gladstone have been replaced by contemporary theory, history by politics (the Commune in Paris¹⁶) and reason by biology.

On the question of the restructuring of reason by biology Gladstone turns to an analysis of evolution. What he has in mind is "physical evolution" alone, which he acknowledged "may be true (like the solar theory)," but which he limits to those realms beyond "the human mind and spirit" (706), which he contends are "sovereign by right" but in the applied scope of evolutionary thought are merely deemed "appendages of the material creation." Against such a narrow notion of evolution, Gladstone contends, there exists a higher form of the word, one which "has not been a thing heretofore unknown to history, to philosophy, or to theology," one which is manifest in the thought of Paul, Eusebius, and Augustine. But in addition to these there is "the great drama of human action," in which Greece and Rome stood, the first "making ready a language and an intellectual type," the second "a framework of order and an idea of law," together "shap[ing] and fashion[ing] the destination of a regenerated world." Gladstone counts himself among those who believe that "the old foundations are unshaken still" and who will be "delivered from the fragile tripod of a modern Delphi," as he puts it. But even for those who accept "the fragile tripod," "there lies some deep judicial darkness," "a kind of disbelief, which renounces and repudiates with more than satisfaction what is brightest and best in the inheritance of man." And then follows his question, not intended as merely rhetorical, whether in such a situation "we might not go back to solar adoration," or, with Goethe, to "hasten to the olden gods."

Meeting the Huxleyan Challenge: A Matter of Method

Less than a month after the appearance of Gladstone's "Dawn," the December issue of *The Nineteenth Century*, a full month prior to Réville's reply, carried replies to it by Thomas Huxley and F. Max Müller.¹⁷ The Müller response might be expected; Gladstone had, after all, attacked the solar myth theory in his article. Huxley's is less easy to ex-

plain, however, but Gladstone had raised a discussion of Genesis and the development of bird and animal species and had devoted a fair bit of time, aside from the primary direction of his argument, attempting to demonstrate that the general pattern of development of species noted by the Genesis author fitted what he understood as scientific findings. Huxley thus began his argument with a very brief review of the primitive revelation question, indicating that he was well aware of the major premise under debate, and then turns to a detailed analysis of the most recent scientific evidence on the development of early species as a refutation of Gladstone's claim that it supports his position.

Whatever the development of scientific thought at the time of Huxley's article, his literalism fails to make Gladstone's reading open enough. For Huxley the text is what it says, linked to its own time and place, and is to be read as such and only as such. For Gladstone the text is revelatory as it speaks to his own nineteenth-century time. Gladstone can use the term "evolution" in a lower and a higher form and can, in its lower form, accept it.¹⁸ For Huxley, "evolution" and "rational" have only one meaning as he makes clear in his use of Gladstone's phrase "as one wholly destitute of that kind of knowledge which carries authority," which he punctuates at this point, failing to follow the nuanced section which follows in Gladstone's original: "and who speaks derivatively as best he can, after listening to teachers of repute and such as practise rational methods."¹⁹ That Huxley does not grasp Gladstone's meaning is clear from his emphasis in the section on Gladstone's "personal faith" in this adage and his denial of the "wish of the right to disturb his [Gladstone's] faith."²⁰ For Huxley, faith is a personal choice and rests in a secondary, "personal," position. For Gladstone, faith is "personal," to be certain, but is formulated within the practical world of "reason," a world in which one is called to speak "derivatively *as best [one] can*," and to do so only "after listening to teachers of repute," that is "teachers of repute" who "practise rational methods" – methods not formulated by the only standard already structured and framing human thought and actions, but one of the standards by which human thought and actions can be to a

limited degree framed. What Gladstone is emphasizing here is a distinction between "rationalism" and "the rational," two terms which are not separate, but which must be separated. The difficulty is that Huxley fuses them, and in that fusion eliminates the necessity of grace.²¹

Huxley's differentiation of his position with respect to Gladstone's is made clear in his conclusion to his article. He proposes "to add a word or two ... on science and religion,"²² but it is clear from his comments that he has switched the framework of a discussion on the nature of rationality (which according to Gladstone could include a treatment of faith and which necessitated a differentiation between "rationalism" and "reason") to one which separated the two, linked "reason" with "science" and thus formed a dichotomy which refused to allow reason into the domain of faith. Thus Huxley appears to limit "science" to "only that which is susceptible of clear comprehension," but he continues immediately to sketch the "boundaries of that province" in which, he suggests (his final remark is not to be discounted by the earlier two), one "must be content with imagination, with hope, and with ignorance" (859). "The perfect ideal of religion" for Huxley is to be found in the passage from Micah, "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" although he focuses on the first two requirements and leaves the final, "to walk humbly with thy God" to reach into infinity:

But what extent of knowledge, what acuteness of scientific criticism, can touch this, if any one possessed of knowledge, or acuteness, could be absurd enough to make the attempt? Will the progress of research prove that justice is worthless and mercy hateful; will it ever soften the bitter contrast between our actions and our aspirations; or show us the bounds of the universe and bid us say, "Go to, now we comprehend the infinite?"

What exactly Huxley means by "religion" is not clear, nor does he frame the function of "true science" clearly, although he puts himself on its side:

The antagonism of science is not to religion, but to the heathen survivals and the bad philosophy under which religion herself is often well-nigh crushed. And, for my part, I trust that this antagonism will never cease; but that, to the end of time, true science will continue to fulfil one of her most beneficent functions, that of relieving men from the burden of false science which is imposed upon them in the name of religion.

In this respect Huxley missed the mark, as Gladstone makes quite clear in his response, "Proem to Genesis: A Plea for a Fair Trial," in early January the next year,²³ although in the lengthy "proem" Gladstone struggles a fair bit as well. But as he comes to close, he does realize that at stake is a differing view of reason and some misconceptions on Huxley's part as to his own position. Huxley, it appears, is the literalist: he

seems to assume that revelation is to be conceived of as though it were a lawyer's parchment, or a sum in arithmetic, wherein a flaw discovered at a particular point is ipso facto fatal to the whole. Very little reflection would show Professor Huxley that there may be those who find evidences of the communication of divine knowledge in the Proem to Genesis as they read their Bibles, without approaching to any such conception. There is the uncertainty of translations,... difficulty of transcription,... [and] different readings.... Thus, upon practical grounds, quite apart from the higher questions concerning the original composition, we seem at once to find a human element in the sacred text. (15-16)

But the human, that is the element of limitation and failure, is not what is at stake. Such a human element would speak more against the liberal Réville than the conservative catholic, Gladstone. What is at stake is a debate over the nature of evidence best used when treating ancient texts.

The question whether the proem bears witness to a divine communication, to a working beyond that of

merely human faculties in the composition of the scriptures, is essentially one for the disciples of Bishop Butler; a question not of demonstrative, but of probable, evidence. I am not prepared to abandon, but rather to defend, the following proposition: It is perfectly conceivable that a document penned by the human hand, and transmitted by human means, may contain matter questionable, uncertain, and even mistaken, and yet may by its contents as a whole present such *pioteis*, such moral proofs of truth divinely imparted, as ought irrefragably pro tanto to common assent and govern practice. (16)

In his attempt to "demonstrate" Huxley misses the point, according to Gladstone. There is no demonstration, only an "approximation to the present presumptions and conclusions of science," as Huxley's argument itself shows. Neither the Acadians nor the Assyrians nor the Egyptians for all their learning came so close to the "approximation" of this "obscure" people, the Hebrews:

as to the Mosaic writer himself, all I presume to accept is the fact that he put upon undying record ... a series of particulars which, interpreted in the growing light of modern knowledge, require from us, on the whole, as reasonable men, the admission that we do not see how he could have written them, without aid from the guidance of a more than human power.

This may be the weakest point in Gladstone's argument in the sense of a demonstrable point, but he continues to hold firmly to the Butlerian principle of probability and we must not presuppose that he is arguing for the probability of a particular set of revealed propositions: "It is this guidance and not necessarily or uniformly the consciousness of the writer, that, according to my poor conception, the idea of revelation mainly lies" (17).

The argument is not about evolution – Gladstone is perfectly willing to accept the evolutionary hypothesis; it can suit the Christian model as well as be worked against it. Rather, it has to do with an approach, the

“strictly scientific” approach of Réville or as Huxley would put it, the “assertion that the things of science ... are ‘susceptible of clear intellectual comprehension.’” Herein is the intellectual downfall of the approach. One can tell that the branch passes to the twig, “but can we understand the slightest mutation or growth in nature itself? Can we tell *how* the twig passes into leaf and flower?” (18). There is an ordered knowledge of this “how,” attained on the basis of probability. When applied to religion, “the heart and life of man,” such knowledge gained is theology, no less to be despised than is botany or astronomy, equally probable structures gained in the admiration of trees, plants, flowers, the sun, and the moon. Huxley’s problem, according to Gladstone, is that he is quite willing to accept religion which he equates with doing justice and loving mercy and “walking humbly with your God,” but that he rejects theology. As a result he cannot judge where the religious admonitions cease: why would they not continue through and into the Beatitudes, for example, and, further, why not into the “Paradiso” itself, in which humanity reaches by grace the full potential of its will in the grace of a larger will: “In la sua voluntade è nostra pace” (19).

Indeed, the present form of knowledge is not the close of all knowledge. Huxley misunderstands the possibility of human potential. Gladstone is again more “liberal” than Huxley: “It may be that we shall find that Christianity itself is in some sort a scaffolding, and that the final building is a pure and perfect theism” (19). There is after all a *development* of doctrine, something on the model of the evolutionary hypothesis. The problem is to grasp the reality of the life force that infuses this sequence beyond nature. Gladstone does not oppose the “comparative refinement of nature” except in so far as it “lead[s one] to undervalue the stores of that rich armoury which Christianity has provided to equip us for our great life-battle” (20).

Réville’s Reply

But there has still been no reply from Réville. The Frenchman had been delayed by a trip to Italy. Nevertheless, in the January 1886 issue of

The Nineteenth Century Réville's "'Dawn of creation' An Answer to Mr. Gladstone" was published, closing the volume that Gladstone opened with a response to Huxley's salvo against him.²⁴ Réville's response was initiated with a long personal remark, commenting on his time in Italy and his dedication to Gladstone's Liberal politics, but not to his religious conservatism. For Réville the two are separable, and he goes on to take his place with vigor beside the arguments of Müller and Huxley (161). He then proceeds, claiming that Gladstone has formed his argument on "the idea of a primitive revelation made to the human race, or whether he rejects this hypothesis as unproved or anti-scientific. In the first case this history is the history of a prolonged decadence. In the second it is the history of a progressive evolution.... If Mr. Gladstone himself undertook a general history of religion, I would defy him to escape from this necessity" (162).

Whatever the choice (between "the history of a prolonged decadence" or "the history of a progressive evolution"), it is to the second that Réville directs his attention. He recognizes that Gladstone has shifted his argument to some extent, granting, among other matters, that earlier that British politician "only entered indirectly into the theological bearings of his researches" (162), but these he sets to one side. Of the two major issues upon which Réville claims difference from Gladstone, his review of Genesis and his understanding of Homer, it is to the first that he focuses his attention, he insists, although the second is seldom far from his sight. There is one aspect of the human mind that Réville takes for granted: "the essential unity of the human mind."

The general history of religious beliefs and practices shows that very curious ideas and customs, entirely unconnected with those that now occupy us, have existed among very different and very distant nations, although it is not possible reasonably to suppose that they were communicated. In such cases it is necessary simply to investigate the psychological point of departure of these ideas and customs; and if this can be discovered, the

conclusion must be drawn that the essential unity of the human mind causes it often, when starting from the same intuition or principle, to arrive in many different regions at consequences, applications, and analogies of belief which are truly astonishing both from their strangeness and from their resemblances. (163-64)

This “essential unity of the human mind,” in this argument at least, stands as the functional aspect of his argument. Where he differentiates himself from the British Prime Minister is in the general context of his argument. Réville casts his eye on the “essential unity of the human mind” as a proven, or at least acceptable, reality. Gladstone, equally certain of its reality, will refuse to argue, at least in this debate, from this principle. In those areas of human knowledge in which “a comparison of analogies and correspondences is especially instructive, it is undoubtedly the history of religions” (164), Réville states, with which he is particularly concerned. We cannot confine ourselves to Greece, he insists, but must rather understand the human mind as having a unity beyond this single race. He thus turns to the “comparative method” for the elucidation of “obscure points,” which he then treats with an exegesis of the points from Greek mythology that Gladstone had used to attack him (164-68) before taking up his conclusion.

In the next section of the article (168-73) Réville takes up those passages in the “Biblical account of Creation ... contradicted by modern science,” although he will do so, he insists, “while rendering full homage to the beauty and religious purity of the Biblical account of the Creation” (168). After a brief positive reflection on Huxley’s article, Réville goes on to a rapid explication of the meaning of “day,” “firmament,” “make and create,” and the plural “us” in reference to God in Genesis, agreeing that Gladstone’s comment that his reference to Adam’s and Eve’s breaking of the commandment as “the morality of a little child, the undeveloped morality of obedience” (172; Gladstone [1885], 16). Already in that statement there “is some approach to an agreement,” he suggests, but he immediately turns to a more literalistic reading of the section, wondering

whether, before their eating, Adam and Eve knew they were sinning by so doing. But "there is great difficulty in demonstrating [the] true meaning" of these passages, and Réville sides with those who reject a reading of this passage from Genesis as a prophetic reading of the redemption. He holds to a formal reading alone in its historic Jahvehist-Elohimist setting, unlike Gladstone who reads the text within its fuller function as a "biblical" text as a whole (173).

Réville then proceeds to analyze his own view of the religious impulse and to distinguish himself from Gladstone's (and others') "dogmatic traditions of the Church," although he insists that he is "in truth more and more convinced of the legitimacy of the religious principle in the human mind." This is "the prophetic indication of the higher destiny of man." If we do not continue to move in this direction (as we did "eighteen hundred years ago"), we will either "cease to be religious" or we will find ourselves "compelled to be in a certain measure Christian." What precisely he means by this principle "in a certain measure" is not specifically made clear, but his rhetorical polish is clearly thought through, forcing the careful reader to limit a supposed Gladstonian reading of Réville's "truth" in his initial thrust to becoming "more and more convinced" of "the legitimacy" of that principle "in the human mind" as his argument proceeds.

The universal aspect of his argument is not limited, however: Réville is committed to a greeting (1) "with enthusiasm" of "the complete liberty of conscience and intelligence," (2) "contained in principle in the Gospel," (3) "partially restored at the Reformation and completely won in our own day" (174). I have separated the final three sections of this statement to help distinguish Réville's from Gladstone's view. At stake here is "the complete liberty of conscience and intelligence," only "partially" won during the Reformation era and "completely" achieved in the late nineteenth century. All other views are to be overcome: they are those of childhood and youth; they may have "grandeur," "poetry," and "mystic beauty," but they are to be bade a "melancholy farewell." Paganism is dead, as are "sincere Roman Catholics." They represent, we are

led to believe, “the angry shock of opposing religious principles and ideas,” through which “a great synthesis *will* arise which *may* satisfy” all. The italics in the quotation are mine; the “great synthesis” *will* arise – we can only hope that it “*may* satisfy all.” “The love of truth” is but “*one* of the elements of the love of God;” it is Gladstone’s mark in the political sphere (“perhaps he has been less happy in the excursion into the field of religious science” [175]), it is great and it shall remain, but “Neither the rage of an irreligious fanaticism, nor the sentimentality of an emasculated romanticism, must guide us in this voyage towards the unknown or the little known.”

Gladstone’s Commitment

Why Gladstone replied at length to Huxley’s response²⁵ but did not carry on the debate with Réville is not immediately apparent. Certainly his return to a third term in British political life played its role. In large part, however, one can suppose that it is framed by the meanings of “this voyage towards the unknown or the little known.” That voyage, for both Huxley and Réville, is framed by this world, not another, and Huxley was foremost in the British social world – to Gladstone’s eyes at the time – for structuring such an approach. That was certainly one of the major reasons for Gladstone’s directing his argument against him rather than Réville at the time, a period in which Gladstone’s third term as premier was beginning. But one should avoid *The Times*’ comment that the battle was a “hopeless waste of energy”²⁶ or the direct attacks on Gladstone wielded by modern writers and based solely on the words of Gladstone’s opponents.²⁷

There is, after all, a tendency in Gladstone’s argument for the liberal valuation of all cultures. Formed in the image and likeness of God, all human beings as individuals and as a whole thereby have a dignity that cannot be denied them however fallen they might be. As such much can be expected of them in whatever culture they are formed. Nature stands not simply on its own, and Homer and the Greeks offer a special example of this. Created in the image and likeness of the divine it bears with it the

mark of a primitive revelation, "gracing" it in its initial form and not only preparing it for the fullness of Revelation, but allowing it to play a preparatory role (as did the Greeks) toward and in the Christian tradition. Such primitive revelation guarantees the unity of the human race (the Huxleyan/Darwinian polygenetic model can offer no such promise), thus allowing the extension of liberal democratic values to all cultures. In primitive revelation too lies Gladstone's openness to "other sheep, not of this fold,"²⁸ and his dis-ease with full-blown imperialism. In this primitive revelation too are the roots of the Liberal defense of the individual and the parallel expectations for such an individual in a Liberal laissez-faire economy. It is this same belief that opens Gladstone to an "egalitarian" morality, one quite the opposite of that marking the attitudes of those who link morality to the developed critical intellect and its implicit élitism.

Thus a "moralist" like Huxley hopes initially to remove the "moral" element from the argument – that is, to narrow the argument to protozoa, as it were, from Gladstone's more broadly sweeping "human" program, but in fact splitting theology from religion and attacking the former. He outflanks his opponent by keeping an intellectual "moral" element at the same time as rejecting it, thereby moralizing the new science and developing a legitimate secular theology in a separately politicized context.²⁹ The same might be argued against the more broadly theological Réville, who, while opposing the "narrow moralism" of a Huxley, projected his programme more directly into the future. Huxley and Réville thus can be seen as arguing in the same way as Gould, who missed the implication of Gladstone's argument, supposing that their articles were not "rhetorical" and that Gladstone's was.

A denial of primitive revelation alone, such as Gladstone's, however, is a denial of the limitations of nature, including its rhetorical aspects, and the promise of a fuller form of divine aid from this point of view. Human nature cannot be maintained by nature alone. A recognition of nature's limitations and the resulting expectation of a world beyond them "requires" external objective direction. For the young Gladstone this was

nothing other, from his perspective, than arguing that the State requires a conscience, best reflected in the Established Church. Never an Erastian in the Warburtonian sense, Gladstone denied the latter's teaching that "civil society, being defective in the control of motives and in the sanction of reward, had in all ages called in the aid of religion to supply the want."³⁰ Similarly, Gladstone rejected Paley's teaching that "no form of outward institution enters into the composition of Christianity. 'The authority, therefore, of a church establishment, is founded upon its utility': and the end is 'the preservation and communication of religious knowledge.'"³¹ Rather, he held with Hooker, who "teaches ... the great doctrine that the state is a person, having a conscience, cognizant of matter of religion, and bound by all constitutional and natural means to advance it."³²

These might have been the old positions of the young Tory politician, but they remained to a large degree in their Liberal dressings with the older statesman. As a senior political theorist, the theology remained the same. The debate merely entered a new mode – no longer the one in which Gladstone had worked. Previously, in the Church-State model the former served as the conscience of the latter, even when the latter rejected it; the primary and universal political dimension was not represented in the Church's central liturgical act. But now the debate was based on a state-dominant and inclusive model, within which the new "secular" morality, having denied primitive revelation, was no longer aware of the need for any revelatory fullness: it separated itself from religious establishments and became coexistent with the maintenance of universal mass order.

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Notes

¹ See the collection of major articles as gathered in *The Order of Creation The Conflict between Genesis and Geology. A Controversy between the Hon. W.E. Gladstone, Prof. Max Müller, Prof. T.H. Huxley, M. Réville, E. Lynn Linton* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, n.d.). A list of the publications by The Truth Seeker Press included in the volume indicates the

press's "humanistic" and fiercely anti-Catholic position.

² *Natural History* 9 (1988), 12-20.

³ This is even the case with H.C.G. Matthew himself. See his *Gladstone 1809-1898* (Oxford UP, 1997), 486. Although it is near commonplace for Gladstone scholars to comment on the politician's rhetorical prowess, surprisingly few studies have been given to the nature and function of his persuasive style or, indeed, to the shape of that style within other "Liberal" rhetorics of his day. In 1987 H.C.G. Matthew initiated reflections on the matter in a typically insightful and stimulating paper, reprinted a decade later as "Gladstone, Rhetoric, and Politics." See H.C.G. Matthew, "Gladstone, Political Rhetoric and Public Opinion in Britain since 1860," in *Politics and Social Change in Modern Britain: Essays presented to A.F. Thompson*, ed. P.J. Waller (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), and "Gladstone, Rhetoric and Politics," in Peter J. Jagger, ed., *Gladstone* (London: Hambledon, 1998), 213-34. However one evaluates Matthew's argument, his piece suggests a number of directives for further study, not only with respect to a range of topics in nineteenth-century political rhetoric, but to seventeenth- and twentieth-century issues as well. There are aspects of the paper that point forward to the "post-modernist" histories and the resulting debates of the 1990s as well as suggestions that direct the reader back in time to re-consider an earlier form of rhetorical analysis. Note the reservations in Bruce L. Kinzer's review of the Jagger volume in *Victorian Studies* 43 (2000), 520-23.

⁴ What is even more unfortunate in later misconstructions of the debate is that avenues are closed for understanding the theoretical basis for a number of Gladstone's political decisions, arrived at as they were not merely as the result of political expediency, but rooted in his ongoing reflections on the nature/grace problem and its application to his life-long concern with the relation between Christianity and society and the place of the Christian politician in an ever more secularized state.

⁵ *The Gladstone Diaries*, Edited by M.R.D. Foot and H.C.G. Matthew, 14 vols. (Oxford UP, 1968-1994), 11:398 (13 September); see also 373). Hereafter GD.

⁶ Note as well, particularly, Réville's *Lectures on the Origin and*

Growth of Religion as illustrated by the Native Religions of Mexico and Peru (London: Williams and Norgate, 1884); *History of the Dogma of the Deity of Jesus Christ*, tr. Ann Swaine (London: For the Unitarian Association, 1878; first published Paris, 1860 as *Jésus de Nazareth. Études critiques sur les antécédents de l'histoire évangélique et la vie de Jésus*, rpt., 2 vols. (Paris: Fischbacher, 1897). On Réville see Jacques Marty, *Albert Réville, sa vie son oeuvre* (Paris: Cahors & Alençon, 1912).

⁷ One regrets that Tomoko Masuzawa did not take it up in her *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (U of Chicago P, 1993), although her treatment of Müller gives good indications of her direction in this respect.

⁸ Albert Réville, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by the Native Religions of Mexico and Peru* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1884). Pagination as indicated in text.

⁹ For the final French passage from Victor de Laprade see his *Idylles Héroïques* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1862), 356.

¹⁰ W.E. Gladstone, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, 3 vols. (Oxford UP, 1858). On the German translation, see “frei bearbeitet von Dr. A. Shuster” (Leipzig, 1863). For the later versions on Gladstone’s writings on Homer, see his *An 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: John Murray, 1865). Cf. his *Gleanings* 7:31-96; his *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Heroic Age* (London: Macmillan, 1869); and his *Primer of Homer* (London: Macmillan, 1878). On Gladstone’s reading of Homer and the scholarship of his day see David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer and Politics* (Oxford UP, 2004), 142-43, and note “Gladstone’s View of Homer” in John L. Myres, *Homer and his Critics*, edited by Dorothea Gray (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 94-122, as well as Eric Glasgow, “Gladstone’s Homer,” *Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature* 5 (1982), 61-81.

¹¹ Gladstone began to read the book on 19 July 1885 (GD 11:373). His fully annotated copy of the English translation of Réville is preserved in Gladstone’s Library, Hawarden, K51/1.

¹² He began his article on 6 October (GD 11:411).

¹³ W.E. Gladstone, "The Dawn of Creation and Worship: Reply to Dr. Réville," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (November 1885), 685-706.

¹⁴ On Joseph Butler (1692-1752) see Gladstone's edition with a supplementary explanatory volume, *The Works of Joseph Butler ...: divided into sections, with sectional headings, an index to each volume, and some occasional notes, also prefatory matter*, edited by W.E. Gladstone... 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896). For the range of interest in Butler see Jane Garnett, "Bishop Butler and the *Zeitgeist*: Butler and the Development of Christian Moral Philosophy in Victorian Britain," in Christopher Cunliffe, ed., *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentury Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 63-96.

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey...", lines 38-40. Gladstone omits line 39.

¹⁶ See Mrs. E. Lynn Linton, "A Protest and a Plea," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 260 (January 1886), 75-85.

¹⁷ T.H. Huxley, "The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 849-60; Friedrich Max Müller, "Solar Myths," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 900-922. Gladstone received an early copy of Huxley's salvo and by 1 December *The Times* could announce that "Mr Gladstone will contribute to the January number of *The Nineteenth Century* a rejoinder to Professor Huxley's reply (in the current number [which had appeared on that same day]).... It is entitled 'Proem to Genesis: A Plea for a fair Trial.'"

¹⁸ W.E. Gladstone, "The Dawn of Creation and Worship: Reply to Dr. Réville," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (November 1885), 706.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 695.

²⁰ T.H. Huxley, "The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 859.

²¹ As he concludes his chapter on "Rationalism" in his early work, *Church Principles*, Gladstone makes his point: "That consequently upon the foregoing principles, the natural entry of grace into the soul of man is through the affections, and anterior to the action of the understanding upon

the subject. As, therefore, it is rationalistic to say, Christian doctrine must be true or false, according as it is agreeable or repugnant to our natural perceptions, so also is it rationalistic to trust exclusively to teaching as an instrument of salvation: or to maintain that intellectual apprehension is a necessary or invariable precondition of spiritual agency upon the soul. That as the need and the applicability of Divine influences are so large in extent and embrace so many more persons than possess an active understanding, the rationalism which makes these influences dependent on doctrine only as the medium of their conveyance to men, is exceedingly dangerous to Christianity. That by all these considerations we are prepared to anticipate, in a religion having the wide scope of the Gospel, some distinct provision for the conveyance of grace otherwise than through the understanding or in connexion with its agency; and some rites or institutions which should both convey grace in this separate and transcendent manner, and likewise mark, to the view of men, in the most forcible manner, the distinctness of these channels; and the complex and mystical constitution of all religious ordinances whatever, as consisting of an outward representation or instrumentality, and an inward living power." W.E. Gladstone, *Church Principles considered in their Results* (London: John Murray, 1840), 84.

²² T.H. Huxley, "The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 859.

²³ W.E. Gladstone, "Proem to Genesis: A Plea for a Fair Trial," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (January 1886), 1-21.

²⁴ Albert Réville, "'Dawn of creation' An Answer to Mr. Gladstone," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (January 1886), 160-75. The journal had earlier included T.H. Huxley, "The Interpreters of Genesis and the Interpreters of Nature," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 849-60 and Friedrich Max Müller, "Solar Myths," *The Nineteenth Century* 18 (December 1885), 900-922, on both of which see below. The issue of January 1886 opened with Gladstone's reply to Huxley, W.E. Gladstone, "Proem to Genesis: A Plea for a Fair Trial," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (January 1886), 1-21, and concluded with a one-age response from Gladstone (William Gladstone, "Post Script to Article on 'Proem to Genesis,'" *The Nineteenth Century* 19 [January 1886],

176), not on Réville's article, which Gladstone appears to have received after submitting his article to press (see GD 11:466n4 and 471, n. 10).

²⁵ The following papers treated the continuation of the debate with Huxley, including one piece by Henry Drummond: T.H. Huxley, "Mr. Gladstone and Genesis (No. I)," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (February 1886), 191-205; Henry Drummond, "Mr Gladstone and Genesis (No. 2)," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (February 1886), 206-14; T.H. Huxley, "The Evolution of Theology: An Anthropological Study (Part I)," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (March 1886), 346-65; T.H. Huxley, "The Evolution of Theology (Part II)," *The Nineteenth Century* 19 (April 1886), 485-506; W.E. Gladstone, "Letter to Huxley," *The Nineteenth Century* 20 (1886), 304. On the debate in the following years see also T.H. Huxley, "Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Realisms," *The Nineteenth Century* 21 (February 1887), 191-205; W.E. Gladstone, "The Greater Gods of Olympus (Part I)," *The Nineteenth Century* 21 (February 1887), 460-80; T.H. Huxley, "Science and Pseudo-Science," *The Nineteenth Century* 21 (April 1887), 191-205; W.E. Gladstone, "The Greater Gods of Olympus (Part II)," *The Nineteenth Century* 21 (May 1887), 748-70; W.E. Gladstone, "The Greater Gods of Olympus (Part III)," *The Nineteenth Century* 21 (July 1887), 79-102; W.E. Gladstone, "The Elizabethan Settlement of Religion," *The Nineteenth Century* 24 (July 1888), 1-13; T.H. Huxley, "Agnosticism," *The Nineteenth Century* 25 (February 1889), 169-94; T.H. Huxley, "the Value of Witnesses to the Miraculous," *The Nineteenth Century* 25 (February 1889), 438-53; T.H. Huxley, "The Keepers of the Herd of Swine," *The Nineteenth Century* 28 (December 1890), 467-79; W.E. Gladstone, *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* (London: 1890); includes reply to Huxley on the herd of swine; W.E. Gladstone, *Landmarks of Homeric Study, together with an Essay on the Points of Contact between the Assyrian Tablets and the Homeric Text* (London: MacMillan, 1890); T.H. Huxley, "Illustrations of Mr. Gladstone's Controversial Method," *The Nineteenth Century* 29 (March 1891), 455-67; W.E. Gladstone, "On Ancient Beliefs in a Future State," *The Nineteenth Century* 30 (March 1891), 658-76.

²⁶ See *The Times*, 8 January 1886, 3b.

²⁷ See above all the comments in Adrian Desmond, *Huxley* (London:

Penguin, 1998), 544-45.

²⁸ For parallel positions see the study by Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995).

²⁹ In this regard Huxley is very much like Mrs. Humphrey Ward. On her “debate” with Gladstone at the same time see my “Politics and Theological Liberalism: William Gladstone and Mrs. Humphry Ward,” *Journal of Religious History* 25/2 (June 2001), 158-72.

³⁰ *The State in its Relations with the Church* (London: John Murray and Hatchard and Sons, 1838), 1:13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:18.

³² *Ibid.*, 1:11. Thus Gladstone opposed such positions as that of F.D. Maurice: “Whereas... Gladstone held that the State is capable of taking cognisance of, and has a duty to acknowledge, theological truth, Maurice denied this and based the State’s duty to recognize the Church and ‘give it free scope to educate the people’ on the State’s incapacity to do so, though it can see that for its own well-being the people must be educated.” Alexander Roper Vidler, *The Orb and the Cross, A Normative Study in the Relations of Church and State with Reference to Gladstone’s Early Writings* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1945), 31.

