

**HIGH PRIESTHOOD AND
SACRIFICE; AN
EXPOSITION OF THE
EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS**

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High Priesthood and Sacrifice; An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews by William Porcher DuBose

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WILLIAM PORCHER DUBOSE

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EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

BY

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CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | PAGE |
|--|------|
| I Human Destiny through Death | 1 |
| II The Divine Propriety of the Death of Christ | 23 |
| III The High Calling of God to Faith | 43 |
| IV Christ, the All-Tempted yet All-Sinless | 65 |
| V The Elements of High Priesthood in General | 87 |
| VI From First Principles to Perfection | 106 |
| VII The Realization of High Priesthood in Christ | 124 |
| VIII The Old and New Covenants | 145 |
| IX The Sacrifice that Takes Away Sin | 167 |
| X The Blood of the New Covenant | 188 |
| XI The Faith that Inherits Eternal Life | 209 |
| XII Conclusion | 233 |

HIGH PRIESTHOOD AND SACRIFICE

I

HUMAN DESTINY THROUGH DEATH

Hebrews 1-2

WE have our religion through the medium of languages that have been long dead, and that present tendencies in education threaten to render more and more dead to us. Along with the languages, there is a growing disposition to relegate the ideas, the entire symbolic expression and form, of Christianity to the past. The modern world calls for modern modes of thought and modern forms of speech. We have to meet that demand and be able to answer and satisfy whatever of reason or truth there is in it.

Revelation, if it was to come at all, had to come at a time, and in the ideas and language of the time. All that was possible in mitigation of that inevitable disadvantage was that it should come at the best time; — and the best time would be the one whose ideas and language would be, not only the most universal possible in themselves, but also the most convertible into the thought and speech of all other times. From the Hebrew into the Greek, and thence into all succeeding forms of knowledge and expression among men — that, in all the long history of things as they have been,

2 *High Priesthood and Sacrifice*

was the actual, as it cannot but seem to us the best, mode for the entrance of the things of God into the affairs of the world.

The time will never come when the Christian Church can surrender or neglect the Hebrew and Greek sources of its inspiration and life. And the world itself will be the richer and better if it will help us not to do so; if in all the channels and courses of higher education it will multiply the facilities and help us to magnify the importance of these best means to its own highest culture. There are two tasks before us as students and teachers of Christianity. The first is to know and understand our sources. To begin with, we must know our Old Testament as we have never known it before, if we are to take part in the new interpretation of our New Testament that the times demand. For each time must have its own living interpretation, since the interpretation cannot but be, in half measure at least, relative to the time. If the divine part in it is fixed, the human is progressive and changing just in so far as it is living.

All science of life now is a science of beginnings and of growth, or of evolution. The New Testament as absolutely transcends the Old as it fulfils it; but on the other hand, it is as actually the culmination and completion of the Old Testament as it transcends it. The thought, the language, the life of Christianity are from the very beginning Hebrew, transformed and as far as possible universalized by transition through Greek thought and speech. All this history has its mean-

ing, and enters largely into the meaning and form of Christianity as we have it. But it brings with it also its embarrassments. The most immediate consequence comes to us in the manifest fact that we are attempting to address the world to-day, in the matter of its profoundest interest, in terms of the world two thousand years ago. We have first to know what those terms meant then, and to prove that all they meant then they mean now, and mean for all men in all time. Are our Bible and our Creeds to be recognized by us as antiquated? Are the Hebrew phrases and terms of priesthood and sacrifice, and the Greek or Gentile application of them to the Cross of Christ, waxed old and ready to vanish away? Forever no!— but if not, then we must take measures to preserve them, and the only way to preserve them is to make them as living to-day, as much part of our thought and our speech and our life now, as they were two thousand years ago.

In order to do that, we must cease to treat the phraseology, the forms, definitions, and dogmas of Christianity as sacred relics, too sacred to be handled. We must take them out of their napkins, strip them of their accretions, and turn them into current coin. We must let them do business in the life that is living now, and take part in the thought and feeling and activity of the men of the world of to-day. I propose to do something like this with the Gospel in its most primitive or Hebrew form, in the form in which it was actually commended to the traditional sympathies and understanding of the Hebrews themselves, in the Epistle to