

GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF F.D. MAURICE

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Anglican Theology

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is the occurrence of “grace” in the work of Frederick Dennison Maurice, a subject on which there appears to be little explicit discussion.

Maurice is one of the more controversial figures in the annals of Anglican theology. Jeremy Morris, describing the criticism F.D. Maurice encountered, said:

Maurice's approach called down upon his head a formidable body of critics. His rejection of penal substitutionary theories of atonement led to stringent criticism from, amongst others, the Church of Scotland theologian, R. S. Candlish, and the Wesleyan Methodist, J. H. Rigg." His rejection of eternal punishment, and his reinterpretation of eternal life, brought against him the Anglicans Henry Mansel, J. B. Mozley, and his own Principal, R. W. Jelf.¹

John Orens, however, in his essay, "Maurice on Prayer", presents a quite different picture:

There is no Anglican theologian of the nineteenth century more universally revered than Frederick Denison Maurice. Christian Socialist, educator, ecumenist, novelist and priest, Maurice looms above most of his contemporaries in the breadth of his interests and the prophetic spirit which inspired them. Identified with no church party, yet claimed by all, Maurice seems the quintessential Anglican: learned, tolerant and pious.²

¹ Jeremy N. Morris, A Social Doctrine of the Trinity? A Reappraisal of F. D. Maurice on Eternal Life, in “Anglican and Episcopal History”, (Austin: Mar 2000, Vol. 69, Iss. 1; 29 pgs, Proquest Religion), 72

² Darryl M. Jordan, He Hath Filled The Hungry With Good Things: Early Developments in Anglo-Catholic Social Theology, quoting Frank McClain, Richard Norris, John Orens, “F.D. Maurice. A Study” (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1982), 61, (<http://www.anglocatholicsocialism.org/acsocialtheology.html>)

The different opinions may be explained, in part, by the view of Ivan Clutterbuck:

He believed that all class barriers must be broken down and all men brought into the Universal Society of the Church. He might at first have seemed a powerful ally of the ritualists who were slaving away in the parishes to bring to their people the spiritual benefits of the Catholic Church, but although he admitted the dedication of these priests, he disagreed with their methods. Being a broad churchman he disliked their concern for men's sins because he took a more optimistic view of man's nature. Rather than a sinful creature in need of regeneration, Maurice saw man as ignorant and in need of education.³

As further explanation, Richard Niebuhr contributes the observation that “Maurice had no sympathy for any form of triumphalist churchmanship, whether Evangelical or Ritualist, perhaps leading him eventually to affiliate with neither.”⁴

Maurice’s work is enjoying renewed popularity today. Stephen Prickett, in the Presidential Address to the 2002 Annual General Meeting of the MacDonald Society, explains:

... there is much in Maurice's arguments that make more sense in our time than it did in his own. With hindsight, his contemporary reputation for obscurity owed much to the fact that his arguments mesh better with late twentieth-century criticism and aesthetics than they did with the ideas of his own time. The trail of names and comparisons scattered through my text today tell their own story both of Maurice's roots, and the direction of his ideas: Augustine, Dante, Kant, the Schlegels, Schleiermacher, Eliot, Steiner, Derrida. Maurice was strenuously engaged with the cutting edge of ideas in

³ Jordan, op.cit., quoting Ivan Clutterbuck, *Marginal Catholics. Anglo-Catholicism: A Further Chapter of Modern Church History* (Leominster, Hertfordshire: Gracewing, 1993), 115.

⁴ Ibid, quoting H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 50th anniv. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1950, 2001), 221-222.

*his own time, but he is also one of the very few nineteenth century thinkers whose ideas, like those perhaps of Coleridge and Schleiermacher, may yet prove to be at least as relevant for the twenty first century as for his own.*⁵

The re-emergence of theories of the 'social Trinity' is one factor focusing attention on Maurice; with his unusual, for the time, treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity.⁶ Another is his reflexive method. Its' attention to the truth embedded in particular traditions has proved an immensely valuable tool in ecumenical discussion.⁷

But to the subject at hand...

THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines grace (*gratia, Charis*), as "a supernatural gift of God to intellectual creatures (men, angels) for their eternal salvation, whether the latter be furthered and attained through salutary acts or a state of holiness."⁸ Among the three fundamental ideas of the Christian Religion - sin, redemption, and grace - the latter is the means, indispensable and Divinely ordained, to effect the redemption from sin through Christ and to lead men to their eternal destiny in heaven.⁹ However, due to modern theological controversies, it has become necessary to draw a sharper distinction between the transient help to act (actual grace) and the permanent state of grace (sanctifying grace).¹⁰ The latter, sanctifying grace, is what Anglicans refer to as Justification.

⁵ Stephen Prickett, F.D. Maurice: The Man Who Re-Wrote the Book, in "North Wind:Journal of the George MacDonald Society", No. 22, 2003, (http://www.macdonaldsociety.org/NW21_fdmaurice_prickett.htm).

⁶ Morris, op.cit.

⁷ Jeremy N. Morris, Newman and Maurice on the Via Media of the Anglican Church: Contrasts and Affinities, in "Anglican Theological Review", Fall 2003

⁸ The Catholic Encyclopedia, Sanctifying Grace, http://www.newadvent.com/Catholic_Encyclopedia/G/Sanctifying_Grace.html

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines justification as the transforming of the sinner from the state of unrighteousness to the state of holiness and sonship of God. It is considered to be the work of God alone; presupposing, on the part of the adult, the process of justification and the cooperation of his free will with God's preventing and helping grace. Considered as a state or habit, it denotes the continued possession of a quality inherent in the soul.¹¹ In the Anglican tradition "faith without works, and only faith, doth justify us."¹²

MAURICE ON GRACE

Maurice does, of course, discuss the subject of Justification. In his *Theological Essays* he devotes a chapter to it. He begins with the thesis that in the early church baptism was the sign of fellowship, differentiating the churchman from the common man. It conveyed an inward purification, the removal of the common evil all men inherited from Adam.¹³ He noted that to the Church Fathers the blessings of baptism were said to be infinite for those who first received it. Their sins were blotted out, but the blessings were exhausted in the act. Pardon was only available through continual acts of repentance and mortification.¹⁴ This doctrine of post-baptismal sin was revised by the Reformers to mean that faith in the Son of God is the only deliverance for the conscience of man. God, himself, is the justifier. In the words of St. Paul: "He has given Christ for our sins, and has raised Him again for our justification."¹⁵

¹¹ The Catholic Encyclopedia, Justification, (http://www.newadvent.com/Catholic_Encyclopedia/J/Justification.html)

¹² Thomas Cranmer, Homily on Salvation, in "Miscellaneous Writings and Letters", (London: Parker Society, 1846), 132.

¹³ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957), 141

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 142.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 144

As Maurice noted, this was levelling language – breaking down the barriers between the righteous and the wicked.¹⁶ However, in and of itself it created problems. Maurice commented:

It seemed to the Protestant divines and laymen just as necessary to invent plans for dividing the faithful from the unbelieving – those who belonged to Christ from those who had no relation to Him – the elect from the reprobate – as it had ever seemed necessary to the Romanist to divide heathens from the baptized men, ecclesiastics from the laity, the saint from the ordinary Christian.¹⁷

In either case, the great moral distinctions, which God's law proclaims, had been obliterated. Fictitious maxims and standards were introduced; which to Maurice were as unfavourable to the common honesty of daily life as there are to any higher righteousness we should seek as citizen's of God's kingdom.¹⁸ He posited that Justification by faith appeared to connote that God will not punish us hereafter for the sins we commit – as if it pleased God by pure arbitrariness that certain men should escape his wrath and others feel the full brunt of it.¹⁹ Maurice makes these statements, broadly and nakedly, so that they may be examined to determine if they really convey the intention of the several parties. His hope is that by doing so we will determine to labour so that the faith in the hearts of men not be extinguished; and that it will not be utterly misrepresented to their children.²⁰ The solution he offers is to stop drawing lines and limitations about the Gospel of God to divide the righteous from the wicked, and let God himself establish the distinction. Moreover, he seeks to reconcile the different approaches to Justification – the Romanists through Baptism and the Protestants through Faith – by the simple interpretation of Scripture through the lens of the Resurrection;

¹⁶ Maurice, 144.

¹⁷ Maurice, 145.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, 146.

which, he believes, will reconcile these apparently inconsistent tenets by taking from each its exclusive, inhuman and immoral character.²¹

Maurice holds that in Christ's resurrection God justified the Man who perfectly trusted in Him, and declares Him to have the only righteousness which would not have been a sin and a fall for Him to claim – the righteousness of His father – which was His as long as He was content to give up Himself.²² Saint Paul takes it for granted that the Justification of the Son of Man was his own Justification and that for each and every man.²³ God, in justifying His Son by raising Him from the Dead, justified the race for whom Christ died. If His Resurrection did not declare men to be Righteous in Him, Baptism was a nullity. So long as it denoted the true and eternal law of man's relationship to God, the blessing of justification was lawful at every time for all men.²⁴

At the same time as he acknowledged the validity of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, Maurice warned against making Faith itself the object of worship. To him, the Apostle John provided the prescription for complete victory over the world, the flesh and the devil, in saying: "This is the victory that overcometh the world; even our own faith." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Maurice's discussion of Justification is not the end of his discussion of grace. Indeed, grace seems to permeate his work. Niebuhr in his seminal work *Christ and Culture* identifies Maurice as a chief example of "Christ the transformer of culture". This model depicts concern with the redemptive work of God in the incarnation of the Son, and not merely with redemption in his death, resurrection and return to power. It seeks to hold together the various themes of creation and redemption, of

²¹ Maurice, 147.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 149.

incarnation and atonement; bringing all men together into the one universal Kingdom of which Christ is the head.²⁵

Heavily influenced by the idealism of Coleridge, Maurice expressed a theology of universal brotherhood; believing that the Kingdom of God should be accessible to all members of society, In *The Kingdom of God* (1838) and in the later, controversial, *Theological Essays* (1852), he championed an Incarnational theology, which provided an elevated view of humanity with a stress on the importance of educating the masses to recognize their place in God's Kingdom²⁶ Indeed, he saw the purpose of the Church as being to not only educate man, but to awaken thoughts, energies, aspirations and hopes within him.²⁷

Maurice strikingly redefined all human experience in a theological sense, as meaningful only given its prior dependence on God.²⁸ For him, the relationship between the believer and God himself paralleled the inner relations of the Trinity; and the relationship between believers themselves. This "communion" of the faithful, with themselves and with God, is a reflection of God's own inner being as a union of three persons. It thereby ceases to be subject to the radical constraints of temporality. In essence, it is eternal life.²⁹

For Maurice, human beings are spiritual beings; filled with the love, or charity, of God. In his words, "The Bible and the Church speak to me of Charity. My consciousness responds to that speech...I hold this Charity to be the ground and centre of the Universe. I believe God himself to be Charity. He desires me, as I think, to be like Him, to have His charity. I

²⁵ Jordan, op.cit.

²⁶ Nick J. Watson, Stuart Weir, and Stephen Friend, *The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond*, in "The Journal of Religion & Society", vol. 7 2005, (<http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2005/2005-2.html>)

²⁷ W. Merlin Davies, *An Introduction to F.D. Maurice's Theology*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1964), 57

²⁸ Jeremy N. Morris, *A Social Doctrine of the Trinity? A Reappraisal of F. D. Maurice on Eternal Life*, in "Anglican and Episcopal History", op.cit.

²⁹ Ibid.

start from that maxim.”³⁰ He conceives sin and evil as human rebellion against this love.³¹ He asserts that “Christ is in every man-the source of all light that ever visits him”.³²

In *The Kingdom of Christ*, Maurice identifies the signs of a spiritual and universal kingdom as being Baptism, the Creed, Forms of Worship, the Eucharist, the Ministerial Orders, and the Scriptures.³³ Let us use these signs as a guide to further consider the incidence of grace in Maurice’s theology.

Baptism

In *Experiencing God*, Kenneth Leech writes: “Maurice held that all humans beings were created in God’s image and knit together in Christ, and that baptism was the sacramental recognition and assertion of what was already in principle the case.”³⁴ To Maurice, the context of Baptism is a world ruled not by the evil one but already redeemed by Christ. Thus, every child born is born into a world already redeemed. In baptism this truth is claimed and the child is put in relation to it; with the expressed principle of *Werde was Du bist* – become what you are.³⁵ This stands in sharp contrast to the view of his contemporary, Pusey, who held that the context of Baptism was a sinful world on one hand, and Church as the ark of salvation on the other. In baptism the child was brought from the sinful world into the church; given a new nature by regeneration; and infused with the Holy Spirit.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Jeremy N. Morris, A Social Doctrine of the Trinity? op.cit.

³² Ibid.

³³ Frederick Denison Maurice, The Kingdom of Christ: Or Hints Respecting the Principles, Constitution, and Ordinances of the Catholic Church, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., MDCCCXLIII), 519

³⁴ Daniel Prechtel, Notes on the Incarnation, (Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida: Focus School for Ministry, 1999), <http://llministries.homestead.com/files/Incarnation.html>

³⁵ Arthur Michael Ramsay B.D., F.D. Maurice and the Conflicts of Modern Theology, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1951), 35

³⁶ Ibid

Notice that the discussion is about children. Maurice was an advocate of infant baptism. He believed that nothing witnesses more plainly to God's initiative and prevenient grace.³⁷ Since the Gospel is proclaimed to all, all should be summoned to respond in faith to its message signed by baptism. Since it is proclaimed to all, baptism should not be denied to any seeking it; including infants through their parents.³⁸ To him, Baptism is not only the Sacrament of Constant Union with Christ³⁹; it also brings the constant presence of a friend, guide and teacher.⁴⁰

The Creed

Maurice considers the Creed to be an act of allegiance, ever connected with Baptism and deriving its interpretation from it. Through it we are acknowledged as spiritual creatures united to a spiritual being. By proclaiming it we claim our spiritual position and assert our union with that being.⁴¹ Maurice maintains that the The Creed does not set forth opinions but speaks of a person; that it is for a person that our conscience and reason are crying – to know him and our relation to him.⁴²

To Maurice, in the Creed, “ the gospel to the poor is united with the deepest theological science.”⁴³ It has another important and unexpected function in Maurice's view: “The creed has served as a protection to the humbler members of the Church against the inclination which the Church doctors of different ages have manifested to rob them of their

³⁷ W. Merlin Davies, An Introduction to F.D. Maurice's Theology, (London: S.P.C.K., 1964), 28.

³⁸ Timothy Bradshaw, Baptism and Inclusivity in the Church, <http://latimer.godzone.net.nz/morecomment.asp?CoID=78>

³⁹ Davies, 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 29.

⁴¹ Maurice, The Kingdom of Christ, 273

⁴² Davies, 14.

⁴³ Ibid.

inheritance, and to appropriate it to themselves.”⁴⁴ Creeds are the defense of the scriptures and the poor man.⁴⁵

Worship

Maurice’s exposition of the Mattins service, in the Book of Common Prayer, demonstrates the extent of the grace that is found in his work. Good liturgy, he said, aims to rescue worshippers from spiritual individualism.⁴⁶ At the commencement of the Office we are called to confession to obtain forgiveness to fit us for worship. Each is bidden to cast down one’s own burden – the sins that have been separating us from the congregation – to enter into the privileges and devotions of the family. The sin Maurice is referring to here is exclusion from the face of God and one’s brethren.⁴⁷ By the absolution each is admitted back into Christ’s fellowship, and into personhood once again.⁴⁸ We then offer the Lord’s Prayer as children of one family. Every step brings us out of our cold self-interest into closer connexion and sympathy with our fellow men and women.⁴⁹

Psalm 95 opens us to praise of the Father as priests of all creation. The Psalms invite us to enter into joys and sorrows of men who lived thousands of years before us, and an understanding that we too are able to count on the same inspirer of all hearts. The Old Testament reading teaches us history and morality. The Te Deum makes the poorest member of the congregation a fellow worshipper with cherubim and seraphim and connects him with human martyrs, apostles and prophets.⁵⁰ He is made to feel his voice is not lost or forgotten.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Maurice, The Kingdom of Christ, 282

⁴⁵ Ramsey, 30

⁴⁶ Davies, 97

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 98.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 99.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 100.

The New Testament lesson teaches us about the Kingdom of God. The Creed sums up biblical revelation. The Petitions help direct our wishes and longings to God. The Collects provide reflections on a true view of God's character and His relations with man.⁵²

Finally, the Litany brings our needs, and those of thousands of others before God as we pray: for blessing on the whole Church, upon the rulers of the land, upon all nations, upon those who have wandered from the truth, sufferers in body, mind or estate, travellers, widows, orphans, prisoners, captives, even our enemies.⁵³

As Maurice said, "The worshipper has found the object to which the eyes of himself and of all creatures were meant to be directed, in beholding which they attain perfection of their being, while they lose the feeling of selfish appropriation which is incompatible with the perfection."⁵⁴

The Eucharist

Maurice stressed Communion as the living centre of the gospel. There is no other ladder to ascend to God but through the suffering man who bore our infirmities. The sacrifice of Christ is the Communion point.⁵⁵

In our Communion Service, Maurice said,
...we find sin presented to us as the setting up of the self-will which separates man from God, and separates man from man – this sin as put away by a divine and perfect sacrifice, uniting God to man, binding men to each other; participation in this sacrifice as the destruction of the self-will in each man, which is his own curse and the plague of society; the final extinction of it as the triumph of God over Satan, of order over anarchy, of life over death. And out of this great political truth another is instantly evolved, that a

⁵² Davies, 101.

⁵³ Ibid, 102-103.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 106.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 46

Christian's conflict is with a power which is striving to separate him from a happiness already won for him: that a Christian's prayer is that himself and all creatures of God may not resist that will which is striving to bless them.⁵⁶

Communion, sacrifice, and fellowship, Maurice asserts, are the three great aspects of the sacrament. Men long for union and fellowship. In the Eucharist, in Maurice's words, all "shall come to know and feel that they are indeed one with him, and one with each other, and that they shall be so for ever and ever."⁵⁷

Scripture

Maurice believes that the spirit of Scripture is one of confidence, submission and hope in a God who has shown he cares for us.⁵⁸ "There is not a passage in the whole of Scripture," Maurice said, "in which a man is blamed for anything but rejecting a position into which God, of his free love and grace, had brought him..."⁵⁹ The spirit of scripture is truly one of fellowship, and we make a havoc of it if we try to individualize it; instead of accepting that we possess the highest spiritual privileges only because we belong to the body of the Church.⁶⁰

General Observations

Maurice teaches that since Christ set up the Kingdom of God in the world, "men are no longer to be taught that they are to seek God, but they are to be told that God is seeking them...that he has made a covenant with them, that they shall be to him children, that He will be to them a Father."⁶¹ Eternal life means a life in union with the Father and the Son – a life whose centre is not self but the Holy Spirit.⁶² Maurice believes

⁵⁶ Davies, 46-47.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 48.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 34

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ramsay, 54

that Sin is separation from God, the state of death, loss, the loneliness of self-centred and isolation.⁶³ Everything else is simply a variation on the theme.

Perhaps his most grace-filled belief is that those who die impenitently are not certainly lost, and that such loss cannot have the adjective 'everlasting' associated with it. The fire which Scripture and the Athanasian Creed calls eternal has a finite, temporal duration.⁶⁴ This belief is the one that generated such controversy with the publication of his *Theological Studies*, and cost him his position at King's College, London. Maurice did not deny sin and the Fall; but he would not allow it to be the basis of his theology.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

Maurice believed that he was sent into the world to persuade men to recognize Christ as the centre of their fellowship with each other, so they might be united in their families, and their countries.⁶⁶ He contended that Christianity is a religion of this world as well as the next. The believer did not need to ascend to heaven to find Christ, but should seek him "in all our ordinary business and duties, in the cornfield, in the shop, at the marriage feast, wherever we go, whatever we are about."⁶⁷ He insisted that poverty was the fruit of an ungodly society; and that the Church must offer more than charity and the promise of rewards after this life. The classes must be helped, united and reformed so that they were bound by the principle of association and all served the common good. He was convinced that the Church had a gospel for all mankind, irrespective of social condition.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ramsay, 50.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 22.

⁶⁶ Davies, 17.

⁶⁷ Richard Bonney, *Vicar of the Unemployed: Frederic Lewis Donaldson and the Christian Social Ethic*, (<http://www.le.ac.uk/pluralism/Donaldson%202.pdf>)

⁶⁸ Ibid.

As Maurice said:

Christ entered into the state of the lowest beggar, of the poorest, stupidest, wickedest wretch whom that Philosopher or Pharisee can trample upon that he might redeem the humanity which Philosophers, Pharisees, beggars and harlots share together.

That belief is everywhere expressed in the writings of F.D. Maurice. As much as his commentary on Justification, the grace in his work is found in the way he speaks directly to the average person, rather than to the academic or theologian, and makes his theology accessible to all.

Reading Maurice, we are truly brought to the experience of God's love for us and for all mankind.

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