

Afterword

That's the end of the book. That is what happened, as near as I can tell. There remains the question, What does this mean for us today?

Modern Americans read of the Pilgrim settlers, and find them affecting. They visit their settlements, look inside their houses, sit in their chairs. But they do not go home and imitate the Pilgrims' towns, their furniture, or their ideas. Perhaps that is a useful model for modern Christians visiting the Christian past.

Far back in the Hebrew scriptures, there appeared the idea that what God wants of people here below is not the blood of animal sacrifices, but decent treatment of our human neighbors; that priestly purity was not the last word in religious duty, but only the first. Jesus, though he still looked for victory in war as the reward of the repentance of Israel, took that one step further. The Gentile converts who came into the Jesus sect, at first unbidden and even resented, showed how far beyond national Israel that ethical insight might apply. And so Christianity became not one more Jewish sect, but a world religion, though one still dragging along with it some theological baggage from its Jerusalem period. Perhaps that is unfinished business, as the old inspiration continues to operate.

In an essay on "Contemporary Jewish Religion" contributed to Peake's Commentary (1920), Claude G Montefiore observed,

The religious effects of the combination of monotheism with nationalism were deeply marked both for good and evil, for strength and weakness. It certainly promoted an intensity of religious feeling, which, at that time, may not have been attainable in any other way. If the national God had become the One and Only God by being supposed to show an absolute equality of interest in all the nations of the world, it might well have been that this equal interest would have been thought to be a puny interest.

A God who, without mediation or mediator, is equally near to, interested in, and approachable by, the entire human race, a Theism which should be both philosophic and intimate, both pure and warm – for this the Jews have become capable only by slow process of time.

We today are not the end of history. Future ages, if they think of us at all, will find us just as quaint as we now find our cultural ancestors. Perhaps, then, that impetus from an important idea of the early centuries still has a place to go, a way in which it can be more completely realized.

What doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Not to end with a question, or anything, but I think I will leave it at that.

Thanks to readers, for reading. And may something or other in the reading prove to be of use to you hereafter.