



Divinity (Knowledge of) in Catharine Beecher (1800–1878)

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Knowledge of the Divine, Catharine Beecher argued in her *Common Sense Applied to Religion; the Bible and the People* (1857), is gained by reasoning from design and cause. “Design proves the intention and character of the author,” and so from design is proved the nature of the Divine as being “perfect mind,” eternal, and just. Inferred from the truth that every change has a cause is that the Divine exists as First Cause of matter and mind. The Divine as First Cause, being the “author of the mind,” implanted certain truths in all minds, making ordinary minds capable of producing causes and so of addressing questions and discovering truths susceptible to testing, with some truths being superior to others. Knowledge of the Divine is gained not only by the reasoning process of our own minds but also by deductions from personal experience, by experience from other minds, and from the Bible, which provides a source of truths and moral motivations from love. Divine revelation as a linguistic source of knowledge, must be submitted to interpretation and reason. Interpretations change insofar as what is known changes. In terms of reason, texts must be submitted to principles, Common Sense, “and those laws of language which guide mankind in all other practical and personal duties.” Beecher appealed to “reason” or “common sense” principles as demonstrated by, e.g. Thomas Reid. Theories, rather than being forced on mankind, should be examined by women as well as by theologians. Beecher inquired into the nature of God and how to know that nature, at a time when she observed the public mind was placing less faith in authority, tradition, learning, genius, and experience. Beecher reasoned that Jesus Christ, arriving with self-sacrificing love for the purpose of saving sinners, maintained a human soul joined by a Divine mind.

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