



Revelation in Antoinette Brown Blackwell (1825–1921)

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Antoinette Brown Blackwell was perhaps the first woman in the world to preach as a minister in a church, which she did until age 29. At the age of ninety, she preached her last sermon. In between, she changed her idea of revelation and changed her religion from Congregationalist to Unitarian. For Protestants in the nineteenth century, society generally “knew its Bible,” God being revealed through its printed pages. From Bible reading Blackwell turned first to philosophy and then to physics and evolutionary science as the bases of revelation. Aristotle, Galen, Darwin, however, had not resolved the issues she focused on, and so she formulated her own philosophy and science, coming to this conclusion: the way God is revealed is through observation of nature. Through nature divine design becomes evident. Nature allows the view of dynamic evolution which God had put in place, a view unsettling to traditional religious teaching. Through inquiry into biology, Blackwell confirmed an equality of the sexes based on complementary difference, and a God embracing the feminine and masculine. Inquiry into cosmology revealed God as creator of a universe that man must continue to make. Inquiry into the eternal process of physics and the indestructibility of matter revealed God as the initiating energy and persisting power of the universe. The ultimate reality or God is defined as force, energy, activity. On the physical basis of matter and energy, human individuals share in immortality. Humanity in the Divine Scheme with reason and moral agency enter the unending process of improvement. Each child inherits its permanent constitution directly from God, a constitution that is individual, with a personal consciousness larger than mind. Understanding social and moral improvement comes through evolutionary process. Since knowledge “widens generation to generation,” God is revealed in the evolutionary process of matter and motion.

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