

SCHOLASTICISM; OR THE EVOLUTION OF THE LATIN THEOLOGY.

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Our day is the legatee of the Middle Ages. The unspent forces of the scholastic mind and spirit abide with us still. The schoolmen's learned subtleties, philosophic distinctions and theological terminologies project themselves into the twentieth century. Their idolatry of the syllogism, their stern joy in controversial battle, their dogmatic certainty, and fine scent for heresy, struck with decrepitude, come straggling into our time as seekers for a tomb. Explorations in this scholastic field are indispensable to one who would understand the development of systematic theology, and the commanding position still held by the mediæval theologians in Protestant religious thought.

The most significant activity of the Middle Ages is summed up in the word, "scholasticism." Broadly speaking, this wonderful movement of the human spirit ran from the year 1000 to 1400 A. D. It was the illuminating principle, the animating force, the monopolizing enterprise of that otherwise barren period of history. The word itself is non-committal; it reveals no inner characteristic. As contrasted with monasticism, whose aim was the cultivation of piety, scholasticism was an intellectual scientific movement, whose aim was the construction of a scheme of theology. A rationalized system of papal dogmas was the impossible task, laid on the church's intellectual Titans. The futile effort represented, at least, the triumph of spiritual over material forces, and the dominance of Christianity over all other human interests. Keener analysis, profounder speculation, or more magnificent generalization the human mind has never achieved. The builders of Latin theology were deeply

conscientious thinkers, whose work, though challenging obstinate dissent, must ever command the loftiest respect of men. Taking the dogmas as their material, and Aristotle's logic as their instrument, they framed a doctrinal system which holds Catholic loyalty to the present day. Their work attained the dignity of a synthetic view of the universe, embracing all the relations and inter-relations of God, man and the world.

New ideas are stirring in the world just now, however, which are dangerously hostile to their doctrinal fabric. To-day, the scientific method is applied in the study of religious facts; literary and historical methods are applied in the study of scripture; the theory of evolution is applied to the whole of man's nature; belief in the immanence of God in nature and man increasingly prevails; the social interpretation of the teachings of Jesus steadily gains ground; added emphasis on love as the supreme quality in the divine character rings forth in ever clearer note; and likeness to Jesus is insisted on more and more as the adequate and only test of Christian discipleship. These conceptions were strangers to the scholastic mind, and their entrance into the arena of religious thought, means inevitable revision of theological systems, and the virtual undoing of the schoolmen's work.

A momentary glance at the politico-ecclesiastical situation will greatly aid us in this investigation. During this period the empire of Augustus, Constantine and Justinian was not regarded as a thing of the past, but as a vitally present reality. No one thought of it as ended by the political disasters of 476 A. D. The throne of Cæsar, by the sacred hand of the church, had been passed to the Frankish kings, and the new dominion was called the "Holy Roman Empire." Historically, it was a phantom, an unreality, but it was believed in most religiously as a fact. From the view-point of the Middle Ages, this was a vast Christian empire presided over by a civic head, called of God; and by a religious head, known as the vicar of

God. Latin Christianity cherished the idea of a universal monarchy of the world. It was right that it should be, and it was. The emperor and the Pope were equals, reigning for the good of men and the glory of God.

The empire and the church were two aspects of one society, which was destined to overspread the earth. The holy Roman Cæsar was the advocate and defender of the church against her foes; and the holy Roman Pontiff confirmed and hallowed Cæsar in his office, as lord of the world. Such were the ideals, political and spiritual that dominated and fascinated the minds of men from 1000 to 1400 A. D.

A demand gradually arose for a demonstration of the agreement between dogma and human reason. The church had never a doubt of the existence of such harmony. That there could be no contradiction between natural reason and revealed dogma was taken for granted. But as there were many apparent contradictions, it became necessary to reconcile them, to demonstrate the truth of dogma and to prove that ecclesiastical Christianity is a rational religion. The program, then, of scholasticism is to render dogma acceptable to reason.

Not in scepticism did this demand originate, but in unquestioning assent to the church's teaching. It was a sign of the progress of the life of humanity; an announcement that the human mind was pressing into light. Without a question respecting the reasonableness of dogma, or their ability to prove it, the scholastic doctors entered on their work.

GREEK THEOLOGY.

Unhappily during the centuries preceding this high endeavor, there had been in the church a fatal trend from the spirit to the letter, from the inward to the outward. The noble interpretations which Greek philosophy had given to spiritual realities had in the early Latin church declined to crude conceptions. Wholesome reaction sets in with the schoolmen's work, and the process is from

the letter to the spirit, from the outward to the inward aspects of religion. It is a curious fact, however, that these same scholastics were innocently unaware of a Greek interpretation of Christianity, by a people trained for ages in philosophical culture; and that this interpretation differed in every essential point from the faith of the Latin church. So completely had the knowledge of the Greek language and Christian history perished from the minds of men. It is needful that we tarry a moment to note the contrast that obtained between the Latin and Greek conceptions of fundamental truths at the beginning of the Middle Ages.

First: The cardinal doctrine of Latin Christianity was the transcendence of God and his isolation from the world, which is close akin to Deism. Against this view, the Greek affirmed the Immanence of God in nature and history.

Second: The Latin regarded the Incarnation as a remedy for the moral catastrophe which broke man's affiliation with God. The Greek deemed the Incarnation the completion and crown of the spiritual process which began in the creation of man.

Third: The Latin magnified the historical Christ, who figured a brief space in the world, then disappeared, leaving it bereaved of his presence. The Greek emphasized the spiritual or essential Christ, who has always been present in human souls, and became man in order to show the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Fourth: The Latin held Revelation to be the final and definite communication of a message, a deposit in a book, guaranteed by tradition and handed down from age to age. The Greek maintained that Revelation is a continual process by which God is forever manifesting himself in and through human reason. Under this view the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers are revealing agencies, fragmentary and incomplete, but Christ is the full-orbed splendor of the light of God, the incarnation of the divine reason.

Observe, that Transcendence and Immanence are the two terms into which all these particulars of variant opinion are compressible. Latin Christianity set itself to hold man separate from God and nature. If man should discover that this world is beautiful, it would cease to be the waste howling wilderness from which the church is to furnish deliverance. It was due to ignorance of all history, that the inferiority of these Latin conceptions, never once dawned on the minds of schoolmen. This ignorance was mainly traceable to Augustine, for he had vehemently insisted that an impassable moral chasm is fixed between the Christian and the pagan worlds. The fact is, the church of the Middle Ages had become interested in concealing the historical and human conditions of its own development, in order to promote faith in its divine character. That period had about as much knowledge of the human world and its history as the church permitted. Handicapped and dim-sighted, the enterprise groped its way to doom.

THE MATERIALS.

The Bible, the decretals of popes, the canons of councils and the writings of the early Fathers, were the materials out of which our theologians were to make a rational theology. To them, all these elements were included in the term "revelation." Now, primitive Christianity was not a system of thought, but a fact; it was not a series of dogmas, but a gospel. But in the stupendous growth of papal Christianity there had arisen a huge mass of doctrine, unsystematized and unharmonized. From Tertullian had come the formulated doctrine of the Trinity, and from Cyril, the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. But it was from her illustrious thinker, Augustine, that the church had derived her most effective and constructive beliefs. In the dogma of total depravity, he taught man's absolute moral debasement. In that fundamental fact his wonderful genius found warrant for the ecclesiastical structure of Romanism. Through the

church alone, can the grace of salvation be transmitted to the human wreckage. Man, he taught, lost his freedom in the first offense and then became the helpless slave of sin. From this premise, a remorseless logic led him to the concepts of God's unconditional all-powerful will, and election, which marked some souls to glory and others to despair. He then boldly assumed that the church is the kingdom of God, in which alone men can enjoy communion with Christ and become partakers of his grace through baptism and the Supper. This view of original sin became the central ecclesiastical dogma, and the vital support of the church's enormous pretensions. In the view of Augustine she was the divinely appointed and indispensable instrument of salvation. Under this teaching she came to regard herself as literally a member of the divine economy, and her priestly orders as a ladder leading down from heaven to earth. Thus gradually grew up the logical claim and consciousness of unconditional supremacy. A cunning book, written in the sixth century and falsely ascribed to Dionysius, Paul's convert in Athens, taught the divinity and worshipfulness of the church as the kingdom of God on earth. It is easy to see how, in this conception, its historical origin and development are utterly obscured. She seemed to be descended from heaven as an eternal ordinance, becoming visible in an earthly hierarchy. The fact is, the church was simply deified.

At last the time came when it was necessary to combine her scattered dogmas in one harmonious unity. Systematization was needful for convenience of teacher and learner, and that heresy might be tested and repressed. Not only system, but logical demonstration and coherence were required that the demands of the human reason might be met. That the teachings of Augustine and the Fathers were an absolute expression of divine truth, and susceptible of rational explanation, the schoolmen had no doubt. This was their task, and such was the origin of the science of systematic theology as we have it to-day.

METHODS.

And now we turn to note the method employed, which was none other than that of deductive logic. The church was the only institution which survived the turbulent change from the old world to the new, and philosophy was the only surviving science. That science is now invoked. Like the philosophers of Greece, excepting Aristotle, the schoolmen were not seekers after facts. Investigation was not their function. The scientific spirit they had not, but they were masterful dialecticians. They were not set to discover what was true; that had already been determined by the church. Their work was simply to explain the dogma, demonstrate it and deduce the consequences. In the church, philosophy does not mean the pursuit of truth. The church has said *Deus homo*; the schoolman must answer, *Cur deus homo*? The church has said that the bread and the wine have been changed into the body and blood of our Lord. The schoolman does not ask: Is this true? but pliantly bends himself to the task of proving its rationality. The dogma must be made evident to the understanding. So, scholasticism might be defined as an effort for a rational theology under the control of an omnipotent church, with a view to the perpetuation of its authority and power.

The church has now committed itself to the fundamental maxim of the oneness and compatibility of philosophy and theology. They were declared to have the same contents, aims and interests. In explaining religion, philosophy explains itself, and in explaining itself it explains religion. This alliance of faith with science, of theology with philosophy, is the very essence of scholasticism. The church was conscious of the perils of appeal to reason, and she was not slow to set limits to reason's activity. Her fundamental principle, in this supreme constructive effort is absolute submission to authority. She is absolute and final judge of what God's will is and her teaching must be accepted without regard

to the remonstrances of reason or conscience. It has been strikingly and truly said that in the Catholic church "reason went into bankruptcy" when Augustine wrote: "I believe that I may know."

The practical result aimed at, in all these labors, was to make the will of the hierarchy supreme in the world. The premises for theological and philosophical reasoning were unalterably fixed. There was no inducement to the intellect to search for truth by scientific method. Deductive reasoning according to the laws of Aristotle's logic was the universal mode of procedure. Plainly, then, theology was merely the slave of the papacy, and philosophy was the slave of theology. A sovereign church had authorized philosophy, prescribed its field and demanded the construction of a consistent system out of discordant tenets. Faith and philosophy had been separate forces before the schoolman's task began, and when that task becomes an acknowledged failure, philosophy will resume her independent course. But now the two are united in holy wedlock by the authority of the papal church. Scholasticism will flourish while the alliance lasts, but will fall into hopeless decline when it is dissolved.

There was one undreamed of peril in this imprisonment of philosophy. In this servile labor there resulted a gradual strengthening of her faculties. She could not but chafe in this unnatural subordination. Remembering the freedom in which she wrought out the problems of Greek theology, she keenly resented a galling bondage in which her conclusions were predetermined. Samson-like, she will rise up some day and wreck the system she has been constrained to build. It never occurred to the schoolmen to seek the exact meaning of the Scriptures by the study of the original languages. In fact, the application of correct principles of exegesis would have exposed them to persecutions for heresy. For them the history of opinion could have no possible interest. Their active brains were content, under the rules of formal

logic, to draw out of each authoritative doctrine as many conclusions as possible, whether of any practical value or not. In their hands, theology often degenerated into idle hair-splittings, and even into gross irreverence. Scholasticism has no surer mark of identification to-day than this combination of logic and dogma. Philosophy's task was already performed by religion and her only function was simply to ground, develop and defend the dogmas scientifically. Now, the methods, natural to philosophy and theology, materially differ—the former being dependent on reason; the latter, on faith. What the latter asserts on the ground of revelation, the former insists on discovering in the light of reason and experience. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, philosophy, with increasing freedom, passed from the presentation and defense of doctrine to criticism and independence. Finally she abandoned the whole subject-matter of theology and turned to seek the wisdom of this world, as opposed to other-world wisdom. It was out of a sense of disgust with the dialectic subtleties and distinctions of system building that the order of the Mystics arose. These devout Catholics wearied of wire-drawn subtleties, and turned their attention to preaching, to the composition of devotional books and the duties of practical Christianity. They stood for personal piety and the rights of the individual soul, as against the despotic unity of the church, its tiresome dogmas and burdensome round of duties.

Thus far we have discovered the regnant ideas of the scholastic movement. *Transcendence of God* is its cardinal *theological* doctrine, as *total depravity* is its basal *ecclesiastical* doctrine. The *supreme task* is the classification of papal dogmas into a coherent and rational system. Its *dominant aim* or *purpose* is the increase or confirmation of the church's power. Its *materials* are scripture and tradition; its *method*, deductive logic; its *fundamental maxim* the oneness and compatibility of philosophy and theology; its *fundamental principle*, the servile

submission of reason to churchly authority. We have also seen that the schoolman's fitness for his work rested in his sincerity, loyalty and great abilities, while his disqualification lay in his exegetical incompetence and gross ignorance of history.

PROGRESS.

Early in the ninth century the learned Irish priest, John Scotus Erigena, did a pioneer work in this field. In him philosophy, not yet trained to subordination, dared to disport itself with its early Hellenic freedom. He rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, the union of two natures in Christ, predestination and the nascent dogma of transubstantiation, declaring his belief in universal salvation. The church promptly repudiated the work and condemned the author as a heretic.

Two centuries later, Anselm, a great Italian priest, assumed the task. His philosophy humbly took its servile place and function. He escaped Erigena's perils by alleging that the doctrines of God and Christ are not proper subjects of inquiry or doubt. His work was based in anthropology. Reaffirming Augustine's view of depravity, he showed the logical demand for the satisfaction of divine justice. Here was the triumphant answer to the question, *Cur deus homo?* This orthodox genius reconciled the jarring dogmas of Romanism to the satisfaction of hierarchial ambition. But the peace and satisfaction which his work brought to the church was not destined to endure. The fateful metaphysical controversy arose over Realism and Nominalism, dividing the schoolmen into two irreconcilable groups. The fury of this debate lasted two hundred years, issuing in the victory of Nominalism and the downfall of scholasticism. The scholastic Realist, adopting Plato's doctrine of ideas, affirmed the existence of an eternal, ideal, archetypal church, of which the papal church is the earthly counterpart. Such a view buttressed and sanctified their ecclesiastical pretension and usurpation.

The scholastic Nominalist denied the existence of the

eternal idea or prototype. Europe rang with the din of the logical battle, the church was distressed with controversial bitterness, and the mystics hungered for the bread of life. This speculative wrangle was not a mere war of words; it had a practical bearing on the explanation of doctrine. For instance, the Nominalist said, original sin is a mere phrase, the individual sin alone is real; the church is only a collection of individuals with no eternal prototype behind it. He contended that the supremacy of the church could not be advanced by appeal to absurd metaphysic, nor could it be harmed by adhesion to the judgment of sound reason. In this latter view they were gravely mistaken. This position was full of unconscious peril to papal assumption. It meant a coming down from the cloud-lands of mystery, a region always dear to the church; it meant scientific attention to facts and things as we meet them in the world. Without knowing it, the nominalistic theologians had committed themselves to Aristotle's principle of the investigation of the facts of life and nature. The scientific tendency of their principle was not favorable to Romanism and the Realists were quick to discover it.

About the year 1100 A. D. the brilliant French priest, Abelard, entered the lists—the most picturesque, independent, courageous and relentless of all the schoolmen. Logic was his idol. Augustine's aphorism, "I believe that I may know," he cast away as a bit of presumptuous credulity. "An incomprehensible God," he said, "is an impossible God." He essayed to heal the discords of theologic war. To the Nominalist he said, The idea or archetype is an entity and not merely a name; to the Realist he said, The idea or archetype does not exist apart from, but in the object. The hierarchy took alarm at the bold utterances of this Aristotelian athlete and set upon him instantly the brand of heresy. But free thought, while disturbing papal equanimity exceedingly, had now gained too much headway to be suppressed. Before 1200 A. D. the old conviction of the agreement of

reason and Catholic dogma began to be seriously shaken. Doubt was freely expressed as to the possibility of reducing the doctrines of the church to a rational system. Philosophy was constantly proving herself an unmanageable force, and the hour of the declaration of her independence was drawing near. Despite the church's opposition to it, Aristotle's influence among her scholars was steadily increasing. She denounced him as a heathen, and completed opprobrium by pointing to his popularity among the Mohammedans. In 1215 A. D. she put her official condemnation on his physics and metaphysics.

We come now to the strangest evolution ever performed by an infallible church. In less than eighty-five years from the condemnation of Aristotle he became the almost adored official philosophy of the papacy. This curiosity of theological history furnishes the basis of the Latin theology. Plato is discrowned and Aristotle is on the throne. Plato's doctrine of ideas had led some schoolmen towards pantheistic conceptions and to consequent scepticism in matters of dogma. Another result of the study of his writings was a tendency to dissatisfaction with things as they are and the awakening of desire for some ideal of beauty or perfection. Now, above all things, the church wanted an abiding satisfaction with conditions, theological and ecclesiastical, exactly as they were. For these reasons, despite the fact that he taught the Transcendence of God, Plato was abandoned.

Aristotle was found to teach Transcendence, but his special attraction lay in the fact that he stood for conservatism, avowing that things as they now exist, are divine. His idea of nature was that of a hierarchial system, of which God is base and summit. At once he became the ally of the church and the idol of schoolmen. He was called the forerunner of Christ in things natural, as was John the Baptist in things spiritual. He was philosophic Pope. He was made the standard of human reason, and independent thought outside of his views was forbidden. Under Platonic scholasticism there had been

comparative freedom of thought, but that inconvenience is now done away with and even the *task* of the schoolmen is changed. No longer is it to show the harmony of dogma with reason, but rather the harmony of dogma with Aristotle. Erigena, Aselm and Abelard were contradictory, but in Aristotle reason is found a disciplined power and is reduced to a fixed code.

Thomas Aquinas, an Italian priest, arose in the thirteenth century to occupy the central position in the history of scholasticism. He was its spirit and incarnation, and in him the great enterprise made its nearest approach to achievement. He construed all doctrine by the law of Aristotle's thought. The whole churchly system was rationalized by being strictly Aristotelianized. He looked at neither nature nor man nor God with his own eyes, but in the glass of Aristotelian formulas. His system was immortalized in Dante's "Divina Commedia," and to this day he holds supreme rank among Catholic theologians. His theology was designed to be for human thought what the holy Roman empire was for the bodies of men, and what the holy Catholic Church was for the souls of men. It was to dismiss forever the human mind from labor and perplexity by vesting it with all ultimate truth.

The monumental work did not even enslave the thought of the church. Early in the fourteenth century Duns Scotus, an English priest, rose up to inflict on it a fatal breach. He taught with an extraordinary ability the freedom of the will and the doctrine of the "immaculate conception," both of which Aquinas denied. In open defiance of Aquinas he renounced all dependence on reason in matters of doctrine, alleging that revelation is the only source of knowledge. To guard against growing perils, Scotus boldly declared that philosophy is a science distinct from and independent of theology! This was a frank abandonment of scholasticism's fundamental maxim, which affirms the entire oneness and compatibility of reason and dogma. He withdrew doctrine after

doctrine from the possibility of rational proof, as, the existence of God, the incarnation, the immaculate conception, transubstantiation and immortality. He went further and avowed that dogma does not need to be accredited to reason, nor to be supported by it. In blind submission dogma must be accepted on the church's authority. Surely the earth caves beneath scholasticism's imposing edifice.

It remained for Occam, another English priest in the first half of the fourteenth century, to complete the severance of philosophy and theology and so compass the dissolution and downfall of scholasticism. No theological dogma, said he, is rationally demonstrable and theology cannot be made scientific. He spread consternation by showing the absurdly irrational consequences of some of the chief doctrines of the church, and the University of Paris, the intellectual capital of the Middle Ages, promptly put him under ban.

The end of scholasticism came from within and from without. After 1400 A. D. it was utterly divorced from the spirit of the age. It lasted long enough to show that the highest reason cannot defend the tenets of the Latin theology. The nominalistic logicians were its destroyers. Said they, Let's have done with reasoning on the high things of church dogma and institution. Let reason stand apart, while faith unquestioning accepts the creed. Thus philosophy was excluded into her own longed-for sphere of freedom, and the schoolmen's work became one of the most dismal failures in the history of the human mind. There was intellectual sublimity in the aim and in the efforts that seconded it. From the church's point of view, at least, her stupendous claims and incredible beliefs had received the amplest possible justification. But to the philosophic mind the effort at harmonizing papal dogma and human reason was a failure colossal, remediless and absolute.