

THE THEOLOGICAL TREND.*

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The nature of the subject assigned me demands a consideration of the general course of theology, and not merely the development among Baptists. The limits of time require that the treatment be condensed into the barest of outlines.

If we consider the Christian centuries as a whole, we may distinguish the great leading types of theology into four and four only. The first of these is the Latin or Augustinian type, which construes all theological truth around the idea of God as Sovereign. It received its earliest commanding statement at the hands of the great Bishop of Hippo. This theology, revived and made current by John Calvin, has beyond all others ruled in the theological realm since the Reformation. The second is the Greek type of theology, which sought in particular to reconcile Christianity and culture. Its structural principle was the human consciousness, man's sense of freedom and original likeness to God. Under the vitalizing hand of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others, in the early centuries, revived and made current again by Schleiermacher in modern times, this type of theology has gained a currency in our day beyond that of any period in the past. A third type of theology is the sacramental, which economises all doctrine around the conception of the sacraments. In the Roman Church through many centuries, and in the Oxford movement in more recent times, it has asserted its power in the Christian World. The fourth type may be designated the

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theology of the inner life, which has received its chief development in the writings of the Christian mystics at intervals throughout the Christian ages. Its starting point is Christian experience, or the soul in direct relations with God through Christ and the Spirit.

All these types of theology are important factors in the thinking of men to-day. All of them claim the support of the Scriptures, in greater or less degree. They are not, of course, always sharply defined and mutually exclusive. But as conflicting principles, or as presenting materials for fresh combination and larger synthesis, they include within themselves all the essential interests which may be described as strictly and essentially theological. Modern science and philosophy have powerfully impressed themselves in one way or another upon these types of opinion, as we shall see. It remains true, however, that the soul of man, in its attempts to construe its relations to God, has ever planted itself upon one or the other of these four principles, two of which are internal and two external. The two internal principles are: first, man's consciousness of himself as by nature a free moral creature made in God's image; and second, that consciousness as enlightened by regenerating grace and the indwelling Spirit. The two external starting-points are: first the conception of God as Sovereign; and second, of the sacraments as the means of salvation.

We must consider next the great and imperious necessities which have imposed upon modern theology the particular form which the movement has assumed from time to time. The necessities are four—the religious, the ethical, the apologetic and the metaphysical, which, of course, are likewise incapable of being radically and completely disjoined, save for purposes of discussion.

I note first the religious demand as affecting the course of the theological movement. One of the greatest achievements of recent thought is the establishment of the truth that man as such is inherently and incorrigibly a religious being. Another truth which is slowly clarifying itself to

man's view is, that while religion deals with facts, God and the soul, and their relations to each other, the proper office of theology is to set forth as exhaustively as may be the meaning of these facts. Theology, then, is the thought side of religion, and religion is the fact side of theology. Science is at length giving its belated recognition to the great truth that spiritual phenomena are as real as physical; that coherence of thoughts is no less a bit of reality than coherence of atoms; that the attraction of love in a kingdom of persons is as real as the attraction of gravitation in a kingdom of suns and planets.

The modern theological movement thus began under the imperious urgency of man's religious need. Schleiermacher, who more than any other one man perhaps, gave impulse to the new dogmatic construction, began with a religious postulate, man's sense of dependence upon the Absolute. As preacher and as theologian he contended for the rights of the soul in its hunger for God against the barren rationalism which had usurped the place of faith. The adoption, thus, of a fact of consciousness as the focus of theological reconstruction, had implicit in it a new and far-reaching principle. It raised at once the question of authority, and set the Christian consciousness over against the Scripture, natural reason, and the Church. The underlying assumption was that man, as made in God's image and restored to proper relations with God, is a reliable channel for the communication of religious truth. Henceforth, the question of authority in religion shall occupy a more important place in men's thinking than ever before.

This making of man the starting-point in theological reconstruction was the natural fruit of a more general tendency which has prevailed since the Reformation, which has borne at least two marks which will sufficiently distinguish it. The right of individual initiative in secular and religious life, issuing in the principle of private interpretation of Scripture and religious liberty, was one; and the growing sense of the worth of man as man, issu-

ing in the great philanthropies of modern time, with the crowning enterprise of Foreign Missions as its noblest expression, is the other.

Along with the growing sense of human worth and the elevation of the Christian consciousness to a position of authority, there has been a corresponding change in the conception of God. The harsher aspects of the Divine character have been toned down. Fatherhood has been fixed upon as the essential and final interpretation of the idea of God. The idea of law has been revised until the penal element is with many entirely excluded. An enfeebled sense of God's holiness is the great weakness of this type of theology. Aided, it is assumed, by certain aspects of the theory of evolution, sin is understood as infirmity, or a step upward merely into the realm of moral consciousness. Law becomes thus a corrective agency only. As God, the Administrator of Law, is greater than the sinning creature, and as he is essentially Love, there is but one possible issue—universal salvation.

As a part of this general scheme the incarnation of God in Christ is made the basis of an inference which supports the whole, or it is conceived as the starting-point from which the rest is inferred. Christ took hold of the race as such, and is organically and vitally related to every man. This is the basis of Scripture teaching; the inference is that the race thus honored must, in every member, at last be persuaded or chastised into an acceptance of its normal relations of obedience and love to God. Apparent contradictions in Scripture, we are told, must be understood in the light of this inference.

Now, as a mark of the essentially religious character of this tendency in theology, as distinguished from the rationalistic, we may note that the only contradictions which many of its advocates find intolerable are those which bear upon the religious and moral consciousness. They accept, without hesitation in many instances, the intellectual difficulties involved in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Divinity of Christ and the Divine Sover-

eignty, but cannot at all endure in its theological system the existence of any mystery which leaves even an apparent shadow upon the Divine goodness. F. D. Maurice and the poet Robert Browning in England, and George A. Gordon of the United States, may be named as representatives in a general way of the tendency I have been outlining.

2. Another factor which has powerfully influenced the theological movement has been ethical conviction. In part this has appeared as a reaction against an excessive and exclusive individualism in the conception of salvation since the Reformation. The feeling has grown in the minds of earnest men that the ethical implications and social bearings of justification by faith have not been sufficiently recognised in the older theological formularies. All moral excellence and beauty of character are implicit in regeneration and justification, but theology has often been content to leave them thus.

The conception of the worth of the ethical ideal has received reinforcement in several other ways. The pressure of the social question is one. The industrial revolution has produced a crisis in the relations between capital and labour; the intimate and vital relations of the various parts of the world commercially and politically, along with the growing sense of the fearful evil of war, have imparted an urgency to the moral aspects of national problems wholly unprecedented.

The ethical ideal has been aided by the growing historical sense. The real inner principle of sequence by which progress is distinguished from mere movement in historic time is more and more understood to be moral. So profoundly has this mood taken hold upon the thought of our time that votaries of science or literature who acknowledge no transcendent sanction for ethics of the nature of personality are yet in many cases stout champions of the moral ideal. Mr. Huxley and Matthew Arnold, among many, may serve as illustrations. But for all who read the riddle of the historic movement during the past

two thousand years in the light of Christian theism, the conclusion is inevitable that God is both missionary and moral, and that the goal of the historic movement is to be found only in the ethical ideals of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was not merely an ethical teacher, he was also the inaugurator of an ethical enterprise which claims all subsequent ages as its own, and which distinguishes Christianity from all others as the religion of the Divine initiative.

3. A third necessity which has given direction to the theological movement has been the apologetic interest. The attack upon Christianity has changed in its form, and the defences have necessarily undergone a corresponding modification. A universal and once-for-all sufficient defence of the faith seems to be an empty dream, for the reason that unbelief knows no limit in the methods of attack.

In our day the stress of the controversy has been the outgrowth of the new ideal of science. The scientific demand is that nothing be accepted as true which is not based on facts, and which is not capable of verification. The result of this demand is at first to narrow greatly the area of things known as certain, and great impatience with assertions beyond that area. This method of investigation found a powerful ally in the philosophical scepticism of David Hume, as revived and elaborated by Immanuel Kant. This scepticism denied the competency of human reason beyond the range of sense perception. For a time the Positivistic philosophy issuing in the dogma of Agnosticism, seemed to threaten an eclipse of faith. The destructive criticism undertook to apply the rigid scientific method to the books of the Old Testament. At once, however, a strange anomaly in science appeared. The scientific process, so long as it investigated physical nature, was passionately agnostic and distressingly humble in its assertions regarding the unknown. In the realm of Biblical criticism, however, it laid aside its garment of modesty and its agnostic temper, and

often constructed imposing edifices of dogmatic assertion upon the frailest foundations of literary fact. In physical science, moreover, there were methods of verification, canons and standards by which results and conclusions might be weighed and tested, while in the criticism of the Old and New Testaments we yet wait for any established and scientific canons of investigation which have the power to give validity and finality to results. It is not meant that criticism has failed of results. Sober, sane and reverent criticism has rendered a mighty service in creating a sense of perspective in the progressive revelation of the Bible, in fostering the methods of careful historical exegesis and in other ways. So long as it recognises its limitations and rigidly adheres to the scientific principle of refusing to assert without a basis of fact, criticism is a highly serviceable department of theological science. No man is a true Baptist who is unwilling to accept all the light and truth which criticism may bring.

Theology, of course, inevitably felt the effects of the new science and the new philosophy. The inspiration of Scripture, the personality of God, and the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ were simply ignored or set aside by the assumptions of the new naturalism. It was left to Albrecht Ritschl, of Germany, to formulate a dogmatic system which should have as its chief aim the apologetic statement of doctrine. Its merits and demerits can only be understood when the system is viewed as an apologetic. I cannot, of course, expound Ritschl's views in this connection. His adoption of the postulate of agnosticism in his theory of knowledge, and his theory of value-judgments, indicate the crux of his reply to current scepticism. He doubtless restrained many cultivated men from going over entirely to the ranks of unbelief. The issue which his system has left, however, is whether such an attitude in theology can ever serve the practical purposes of a conquering Christianity. History and experience return a negative answer. We must assert on the great fundamentals of faith. The palsy which has seized the

tongue of a large segment of the modern pulpit is the result of a low view of the Person of Christ. Negation or a suspended judgment can never serve the ends of growth and construction. Prophets are born of convictions, not uncertainties; and convictions arise out of experience. We must hark back to experience, the holy of holies of theology, if we would again multiply prophets and rejuvenate theology.

Miracles and the supernatural, of course, received scant courtesy from a dogmatic science and philosophy which insisted upon the universal and exclusive reign of law. Some Christian defenders of the faith have sought to naturalise miracles in the universe, so to speak, by imagining them hidden away in the mechanism of Nature, ready to emerge at the proper moment. This empties them of meaning and reduces them to the naturalistic level.

The issue as to miracles is two-fold. First, it is an issue as to fact. The defender of Christianity need have no fear as to the result. Christian experience acquaints him with the supernatural Force which works the miracle, and thus refutes Hume, who said miracles were contrary to experience and hence to be rejected. The issue is also philosophical. It is not an issue so much between naturalism and supernaturalism, as it is between naturalism and personalism. Is the final unity of things a mechanism or a society, a cosmos or a family? Is force ultimate, or is personality? Are moral interests first, or those which are merely physical? The Christian apologist, in his plea for miracles, stands for order, not chaos; but it is an order in which the moral and spiritual restoration of the society, disordered by sin, is the primary demand. Miracle signalises the supremacy of personality in an ordered universe, and of righteousness as the goal of the historic movement.

4. The fourth necessity which has guided in the theological movement is the metaphysical interest. Here the field is too vast for more than a few hints. The intel-

lectual principle which dominates current metaphysics is the principle of unity, the passion for a single bond capable of unifying the totality of things. Various forms of monism have arisen and contend for the philosophic primacy to-day. Materialistic monism, which finds the ultimate unity in matter, survives, but its importance as a speculative principle in philosophy has been greatly reduced. Pantheistic monism, in one form or another, with its doctrine of the universal substance, has many advocates. The doctrine of the Divine immanence appeals to many modern minds as a sufficient principle for unifying the world; while the apparent difficulty of conceiving of an infinite personality seems to them to ratify and warrant the pantheistic conclusion.

Since Hegel, idealism which identifies existence and thought has had vogue in many quarters, and in recent years, through the leadership of Green, the Cairds and others in Great Britain, and through Royce, Bowne and others in America, idealism in a modified form has gained an ascendancy quite remarkable, and seems destined to be popularised so far as a theory so subtle and intricate is capable of being made popular. Idealism contains a great truth and has discredited the materialistic philosophy beyond hope of successful resuscitation.

An American theologian and a Baptist, Dr. A. H. Strong, has made an able and suggestive contribution to the philosophic quest for a principle of unity in his essay, entitled "Ethical Monism," in which the aim is to safeguard the ethical and personal interests against the perils of pantheism, while recognising the necessity for a single principle as the ultimate key to the problem of existence.

In recent speculation the tendency has been to discredit the traditional arguments for the existence of God. It is beginning to appear, however, that all of them have a certain value in vindicating the theistic postulate even among those who deny their cardinal importance as proofs. Christian theism, with its assertion of the Divine

personality and transcendence as well as immanence, can scarcely be said to have been set aside by any results of recent philosophic labours. The objection to the various forms of monism is not that they are wrong in seeking for a unitary principle, but in imagining that they have traced its operation and method. There is a relative dualism which seems beyond man's speculative skill to overcome. The practical question is whether in our philosophic reconstructions it is expedient to force a unity in the face of the practically irreconcilable dualism of mind and matter, of extension and thought, and in other respects. The only philosophic string which is long enough to tie all the facts of existence together in a single bundle is the conception of a personality immanent in but also distinct from and transcendent above nature.

Of course, a great many important aspects of modern theological thought are omitted from the preceding very condensed summary. But the limits of time allotted to this paper forbid further development of this part of my subject. A few statements will next be in order in the way of criticism or appreciation.

The intelligent student of theology discovers easily in the above sketch the chief antitheses and oppositions between the so-called newer and the older types of theology. One thinks of life as an education, the other of life as a probation; one of Christ as Teacher, the other as Redeemer. The one insists upon love as the characteristic attribute of God, the other upon holiness. The one refuses to leave the Christian consciousness as the seat of authority, the other holds to Scripture or the Church. One insists upon the immanence, the other upon the transcendence of God. One tends towards the naturalistic explanation of the moral and religious life of man, the other insists upon the supernatural. One makes the atonement merely a subjective moral appeal to man, the other sees in it an objective ground of remission. Man's likeness to God is the point of emphasis in the one system, his unlikeness in the other. One asserts human freedom

and ability in religious things, the other denies it and dwells upon the bondage caused by sin.

These antitheses might easily be drawn out still further, but it is unnecessary. The error of most of them lies in the fact that they are half-truths. Much of the newer thought in theology is tentative and unauthoritative, because it is simply a protest against the old. It is born of a repugnance, and not of the judicial quest for truth. Much of the old is also inadequate because it ignores aspects of truth which are essential to a complete Scriptural representation. A radical break with the past in theology is as certainly misleading as that life and growth are certainly continuous, and to omit from our thought of God the conception of his holiness is to destroy the foundation of the religious and moral hope of the race.

Both theologies have simplified too much. Simplification may impoverish truth, which is as rich and complex as life itself. Ritschlianism is no whit less an *a priori* scheme than the most thoroughgoing Calvinism. Schleiermacher's fundamental conception is simple and clear enough, but lacks in comprehension of all the facts. Theology, if it is to be adequate, must not be conceived so much as a scheme of thought as an interpretation of a scheme of life. It must begin with the moral and religious, and not with the merely intellectual starting-point. Theology has too frequently been simply rationalism in a religious garb.

The doctrine of last things has been a storm centre in recent theology. The passionate insistence upon a universal salvation has grown out of the renewed emphasis upon the love and Fatherhood of God, which denies that love can be eternally content in the presence of sin or suffering. But this standpoint ignores the fact of freedom and its possible issues, to despoil man of which would be to destroy his identity as man. It also ignores the present fact of sin and suffering in God's universe, which, from the point of view we are criticising, is itself

irreconcilable with infinite love. Inferences as to the future based on God's love must square themselves with facts of the present, which seem to contradict that love before they can be accepted as final. A man cannot obliterate his shadow by simply looking the other way. God's love will surely vindicate itself in its own way and time, but our eschatology meantime must not slur over facts of life and experience as well as teachings of Scripture.

The critical questions which remain in the theology of to-day are concerned with the following: the basis and nature of religious authority, the deity of Christ and his atoning work, the nature of sin, and the general relations of theology to social questions.

Behind these questions lie the philosophic issues between Christian theism and antitheistic theories, and most fundamental of all the question of the reality and nature of knowledge.

I must now forecast briefly the probable course of the theological reconstruction in the light of the above considerations. Theology, then, in future will not adopt rationalism as its constructive principle, because rationalism is not always compatible with the interests of life. Naturalism also, which fails altogether to yield a theology in the proper sense, will be avoided for the reason that it is incapable of coping with the situation created by sin. Evolution, while containing a relative truth as to physical nature, breaks down in the attempt to explain the phenomena and facts of the personal and social realm. A merely deistic conception of God is, of course, to be discarded as inadequate. The doctrine of the Divine immanence alone cannot serve as a sufficient principle of theological reconstruction, because it inevitably merges God in nature and in man, and tends to pull the entire structure down to the level of naturalism.

Positively stated, the best theology of the future will continue to accept the authority of the Scriptures, but it will take as its starting-point, for the interpretation and illumination of Scripture, the facts of Christian ex-

perience, not in a single aspect, but in their totality. First, because Christian experience, thus employed, conforms to the scientific ideal which above all things seeks to know the facts of nature, life and religion, and resents theoretical constructions apart from experience in the realm of facts. It conforms, second, to the true philosophical ideal, which also demands a fact basis for all the speculative attempts of the intellect. Thirdly, experience will also restore with greatly increased power the older arguments from the cosmos for the existence of God, transferred in part, however, from the cosmos of nature to the cosmos of the inner life. Fourthly, experience will sustain the cause of the supernatural in its collision with naturalism, because it brings contact with the supernatural in consciousness the most indubitable of all the spheres of reality. In the fifth place, experience will in increasing measure establish the validity of the vicarious atonement of Christ, and its corresponding doctrines of sin and of Christ's deity and present action upon men. Thus it will indirectly add an important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity. It will also affirm, and at the same time limit and define, the reality of knowledge of transcendental objects in the religious sphere, and indirectly rejuvenate the weakened convictions of an agnostic science in the realm of material research. Sixth, theological dogma will increasingly become the dogma of conviction as opposed to the dogma of mere authority.

Thus the confusions and contradictions in recent writers on authority, as of Sabatier, for example, will be dispelled. The externalists and internalists on authority will discover a larger truth than either theory. Christ's authority will be seen to be real, but incapable of adequate statement save as a paradox. Christ is man's final authority in religion because he imparts spiritual autonomy to man. Man, who is made in God's image, finds in the truth of Christ the ideal of his own higher moral self. Man realises in and through Christ his own

ideal independence. He is thus eternally a subject and eternally free. Authority in religion will remain external so long as there is a reserve of life and truth in Christ. But that authority is forever in process of becoming internal, as men appropriate Christ. Experience will vindicate the authority of the Scriptures, for the experience of God through Christ and the Spirit is seen to be the real inner bond of unity in all the course of revelation. Scripture as a record of original experience cannot be transcended nor can it lose its authority; for the sufficient reason that to discard Scripture is to discard the only means of understanding the historic Christ who emancipates man and imparts to him spiritual autonomy. Faith expires in a vacuum without contact with the historic Christ of Scripture as well as the risen and ascended and living Christ. Again, experience will guide in the final construction of the doctrine of God, for the reason that experience reaches its conception of God, not through nature, but through man, nature's crown; and not merely through the natural man, but through the supernatural and Divine Man, Jesus Christ. It will also appear, as experience grows, that in its Christian form it gathers together as in a focus all that is valid and universal in man's quest for God. It will at once thus discredit and fulfil the ethnic types of experience by showing their inadequacy to man's needs on the one hand, and on the other that it is the answer of God in Christ to man's age-long endeavour to find God. Christian experience, then, will appear as the universal religious and moral ultimate for man, short of which it is impossible for religious experience to halt, and beyond which it is impossible to proceed.

Now the relation of Baptists to this great theological movement has not been adequately recognised and needs defining afresh. Behind our contentions as to baptism and communion and related topics lie a group of great and elemental principles. These principles are religious ultimates, nay, they are axioms, which the instructed

religious consciousness of man cannot repudiate. I sum them up and submit them as a statement of the basis at once for a new Baptist apologetic and a platform for universal acceptance.

1. The theological axiom: *The holy and loving God has a right to be Sovereign..* Time forbids that I elaborate this statement in its implications as to the incarnation, and as to Christianity as the religion of the Divine initiative.

2. The religious axiom: *All men have an equal right to direct access to God.* This principle is fatal to the practice of infant baptism and to the idea of a human priesthood.

3. The ecclesiastical axiom: *All believers have equal privileges in the Church.* Hierarchies and centralised authorities disappear under the operation of this principle.

4. The moral axiom: *To be responsible man must be free.* This is an elemental truth which cannot receive thoroughgoing application save where ecclesiastical bonds of mere authority are absent.

5. The social axiom: *Love your neighbour as yourself.* This makes the Kingdom of God the goal of the social movement.

6. The religio-civic axiom: *A free Church in a free State.* For this principle Baptists have ever stood. Without it the future of theology and of the Church is fraught with extreme peril.

These axioms are the predestined goal of man's religious thinking. They spring out of Scripture teaching, they meet a deep response in Christian experience. When understood they commend themselves as the universal and necessary and self-evident forms of man's religious life. They are deep like the ocean, elastic and free as the life-giving atmosphere which enswathes the earth, and expansive and comprehensive as the overarching sky. For them the Baptists stand. Planting ourselves upon them our position cannot be successfully

assailed. By means of them Baptists will make fruitful the course of theological development in the ages to come.