

life—although we have not already attained—leading God to believe in us, and so winning our forgiveness. He summed it up in a figure when He likened Himself to the vine, of which we are the branches, and charged us ‘Abide in Me, and I in you.’ And ‘whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not,’ but bears the fruits of Life,—becoming not what he is, but even as his Lord is, if He shall be manifested. So all is gathered up in those two words, ‘in Christ’; and who can unfold all their mysterious wealth of infinite meaning? ‘In Christ’ we are at one with God:—that is the great fact of the Atonement. In Christ Himself: not simply in His incarnation, or in His

passion, or in His resurrection. In Christ Himself we are forgiven, and are ‘saved in His Life.’ And so when sin lies heaviest, and we seem to be standing afar off from God, though we may hardly venture to lift up so much as our eyes to Heaven, we may yet smite upon our breast and plead—

Look Father, look on His Anointed Face,  
And only look on us as found in Him.

And the answer to such prayer, made by One who knows our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking, is a forgiveness that is already a fact, an Atonement which in Christ is very deed.

## The Theology of Auguste Sabatier of Paris.

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Two great questions engage the attention of every reflecting man, and particularly of every religious thinker: the question concerning *truth*, and the question concerning *salvation*. These two questions are closely allied; they have their spring and *raison d'être* in the two groups of evils under which humanity groans: on the one hand, ignorance and error; on the other, sin and suffering. The uncomfortable sense of ignorance and error awakens the desire for *truth*; while the painful sense of sin and suffering gives birth to the desire for *salvation*. According as the thinker feels the pressure of one or other of these evils to be greater, he will devote himself specially to the solution of the one problem or of the other.

Sabatier was led by his spiritual bent in the first of these directions. He felt keenly the evils caused by ignorance and error, and, without neglecting the question of salvation, he applied himself with passionate and indefatigable ardour to the search for *truth*,—for religious truth in the first place, and then for the historical, psychological, philosophic, and scientific truths that stand related to religion. Profoundly convinced of the unity of true science and of true religious faith, he consecrated all his strength to the reconciliation of

faith and science in theology. His solutions may not be accepted, but one thing is certain, that this reconciliation was the great endeavour of his life.

*Christianity is an historical religion.* Such is the truth, a commonplace one seemingly, but eminently suggestive in reality, which lies at the base of Sabatier's theology.

Christianity is an *historical religion*. It has therefore the essential characters of *religion* and *history*. As religion, it is divine and eternal; as history, it has elements that are contingent, transitory, and subject to the laws of evolution.

In order, then, to determine what Christianity is, one must make a separation between the religious element and the profane. The very suggestion of such cleavage has been like an arrow entering the joints of tradition, and has drawn down indignant attacks on Sabatier's head. And yet, so soon as we admit that Christianity is an historical religion, the necessity of such a separation follows by the very nature of things.

But it is just the truly historical character of Christianity that is questioned by some; while others deny its supernatural character. Catholicism and orthodox Protestantism err in viewing Christianity, not merely in its essence, but in its entire historical manifestations, and notably its dogmas, as a supernatural, unchangeable fact, free from the contingency that attaches to other facts of history.

<sup>1</sup> Translated by the Rev. J. Dick Fleming, B.D., from the *Revue Chrétienne*, with the authorization of Professor Ménégosz.

Rationalism, on the other hand, errs by failing to recognize the supernatural character of the Christian religion, and by seeing in it only a product of human thought and reflection.

Both these errors are vigorously combated by Sabatier. He attacks the fundamental premise of all orthodoxy: the dogma of the infallibility of the Church. In Catholicism this dogma is frankly professed, and has culminated in the dogma of papal infallibility. Sabatier shows how this dogma, quite foreign to the teaching of Jesus Christ, was gradually formed in the Church, and how the Episcopacy, which was at the beginning a simple institution of administrative oversight, ended by absorbing all functions of the Church, and by being officially decreed to be of divine institution. Disciplinary authority was transformed into religious authority. It proclaimed its own infallibility. Henceforward it exercised despotic power over mind and conscience. The dogmas defined by it were absolute truth, the pure and correct doctrine, orthodoxy; he who refused submission to them incurred eternal damnation. Sabatier went back to the origin of the dogmas, and showed their manner of formation, their modifications, their evolution in the course of ages. This demonstration forms one of the most brilliant parts of his work; one may dispute matters of detail, but his thesis itself, of the evolution of dogmas, is one that has been definitely won for theology.

These historical studies have had their counterpart in Protestant Dogmatic. The earlier theologians on our side retained the Catholic notion of orthodoxy, and the unchangeable character of Christian doctrine. Only, after having recognized the error of Episcopal infallibility, they substituted for it the infallibility of the Old and New Testament. This dogma was supported by the dogma of the literal inspiration of the biblical writings. Protestantism had thus, on its own side, an external infallible authority. This Protestant authority, too, was made by Sabatier the subject of historical study, and he arrived at analogous conclusions. The Catholic dogma of the infallibility of the Church lies concealed behind the Protestant dogma of the Bible's infallibility; and behind both lies concealed the same error, that of failing to recognize the historical character of Christianity, and claiming to lift the Church out of the conditions of the spiritual life as it has been created by

God. Modern theology has clearly and irrefutably proved the error of this dogmatic prejudice. The books of the Bible have, like other books, their origin and their history; they have been composed, altered, copied, printed, under the same conditions as profane writings; and, so far as they depend on history, they have followed the laws of evolution. Biblical criticism is not merely a right, it is a duty; for it serves to dissipate errors, and to bring us as near as possible to historical truth.

Here, then, have been equally destroyed, in their claim to infallibility, the two great external authorities: that of the Church, and that of the Bible. 'But what remains after that?' cry timorous souls, who have been reared in spiritual slavery, who feel the imperious need of an external infallible authority, and stand giddy before the abyss that seems to open at their feet. They recoil terrified, and turn back in despair to the old authorities that still offer them a refuge, at the price of the abdication of their personal judgment. They close their eyes, and by a vigorous act of 'autosuggestion' they give themselves the command to believe, be it in the infallibility of the Pope, be it in the infallibility of the Bible. In this way they find an appearance of peace in the arms of the old orthodoxy, Catholic or Protestant. But all minds are not able to take this perilous leap. There are those on whom historical truth exercises such influence as will not permit them to deny it with closed eyes. These men recognize that the infallibility of the Church and of Scripture has been once for all disproved by history. For them, too, the problem thus rises—'What remains?'

To this question two very different replies have been given, which Sabatier equally combats.

1. One is the reply of modified orthodoxy. It is not easy to give a definition of this tendency, which springs from the conflict between traditional dogma and historical studies. It is more a practical than a theoretical tendency; it gropes about without principle or method. Influenced more or less unconsciously by the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible and of ecclesiastical dogma—though all the while it has lost faith in this infallibility—it endeavours to retain as much as possible of the traditional doctrine, and only sacrifices, silently or explicitly, what appears to be no longer at all defensible. It is eminently individualistic in this sense, that each theologian concedes more or less (according to his own standards

of judgment) to the exigencies of criticism. One rejects the Trinity, another miracles, another the atonement, another the bodily resurrection of Christ, another eternal punishment; this one retains the authenticity of all the books of the biblical canon, while that one abandons two or three or four, or even a greater number. Some imagine that they can substitute the infallibility of Christ for the infallibility of Scripture; not seeing that when they call in question the text of the Gospels, they are at the same time calling in question the data of these writings relative to Christ. In short, one may discover among the upholders of a modified orthodoxy the plainest illogicalities and the whole gamut of heresy. They will permit others to be heterodox, but only to the extent of their own heterodoxy; and they would fain impose upon others authoritatively, in the name of the Church, the remainder of orthodoxy which they themselves have been pleased to retain. They treat as unbelievers those who do not stop at the limit of their own negations. In this way they reveal the working of the old orthodoxy, its authoritative tendency, and its fondness for excommunication.

Others, who are more or less conscious of their illogical position, feel some scruple in retaining the traditional title of orthodoxy, and in order to ease their conscience they endeavour to do away with the historical meaning of the term 'orthodoxy,' and use it in the original meaning of its Greek roots—*ὀρθός* and *δόξα*—'true doctrine.' When we use words in this way, everyone who believes he has the truth will be justified in calling himself orthodox. Others again, regarding this expedient as rather puerile, prefer to substitute the term 'evangelical' for that of orthodox, and thus monopolize a title that belongs to the whole of Protestantism. Such are the petty arts of an empirical theology that is reduced to the last extremity.

Sabatier was too powerful a thinker to content himself with such a theology; he quietly put it aside with a feeling of pity for those who clung to it.

(2) Another theology presented itself: that of rationalism. In this we are brought face to face with a clearly defined principle. Rationalism derives religion from the human reason, instead of deriving it from divine revelation. Its method on that basis is clear—reason being the criterion of

religion, what is conformable to reason is true; what is not, is false. Rational truth is the supreme form of religious truth. At bottom, rationalism turns religion into philosophy.

Sabatier's psychological observation and philosophical study led him clearly to recognize, in the first place, the essentially differing character of religion and philosophy; and, in the next place, the utter insufficiency of philosophy either to deduce from its premises any religious truth whatsoever, or to prove it by way of dialectic argument. He opposed therefore not only the position of pure rationalism, but also the semi-rationalism of scholastic theology ancient and modern, which, having received the revealed truth, believes it may prove it dialectically, and imagines that this demonstration is the task of the dogmatic theologian. No one was less rationalist than Sabatier; he had, in regard to reason in the religious sphere, the same invincible distrust as one finds in our Reformers. In his view the idea of religion was one with the idea of divine revelation. The whole question with him was to determine properly the nature and mode of this revelation.

There are critics to-day of Sabatier's theology, who believe they can discredit it by qualifying it as rationalist. I will not accuse them of bad faith. But either they do not know what rationalism is, or they do not understand the theology of Sabatier; or it may be they have fathomed neither one nor the other.

According to Sabatier, the basis of religion is divine revelation: not an external revelation in the sense of the orthodox theory, but the inward witness of the Spirit of God as immanent in the human spirit. God is everywhere present: He is present in our spirit; His working upon our conscience gives birth to the religious sentiment, and the first manifestation of this sentiment is prayer. That is why Sabatier can say: Religion is prayer. On the front page of his *Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion*, he inscribed the significant words: '*Quid interius Deo?*' The 'Dieu intérieur,' as he used to name the immanence of the Spirit of God in the spirit of man, is the living power of religion. In emphasizing thus the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, Sabatier based his theology on the teaching of the prophets, of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, and of the Reformers; he built it upon the rock which neither the waves nor the winds can shake.

The witness that is within is the ultimate ground

of our religious convictions. Yet we control these convictions, we correct them, we round them off and strengthen them, by the help of the witness which the Spirit of God has given, and still gives, in the religious consciousness of our fellow-men. Hence it is our duty to study the manifestations of the Spirit of God in history. In this way we retain the element of truth that lies in the orthodox notion of the Word of God. The same thing holds in religion as in art: the artistic sense produces works of art, and in their turn works of art awaken and nourish, develop and purify the artistic sense. All education is based upon this reciprocal influence.

When man wishes to express in words his religious impressions (which affect the soul in its unity—thought, feeling, and will alike) he employs terms borrowed from concrete, daily life. These terms cannot adequately express the ideas; they are only the garment, the image, the symbol of them. For example, when we say that God is a Father, a Judge, a King, a Rock, a Fortress, we do not say what God is *in Himself*; by such comparisons we only utter in words the impression produced in us by the idea of God, under the influence of the witness of the Holy Spirit. All religious formulas are symbolic formulas; and Dogmatic itself is a great system of symbols. Sabatier attached great importance to this psychological truth. He called it *religious symbolism* when he spoke of the principle, and *critical symbolism* when he had the method in view.

Religious symbols, belonging as they do to the order of things contingent, enter into the movement of history, and are subject to the laws of historical evolution. Hence comes the theory of the evolution of dogmas, of which Sabatier has given such a masterly exposition. This explains, too, the earnest zeal with which he prosecuted historical criticism, and biblical criticism in particular, consecrating to these studies all his talents and learning with a scientific independence that was absolute, and an entire freedom from dogmatic prejudice. In this sphere he maintained the supreme authority of reason. This is not theological rationalism; it is but the legitimate employment of reason in accordance with the will of our Creator.

Applying these principles with rigorous logic, Sabatier emancipated himself from the last traces of the dogmas of Church infallibility, the literal

inspiration of Scripture, and a divinely ordained canon to be accepted by the Christian without examination. He certainly had a firm faith in divine Providence, but not in the restricted Providence which places itself at the service of the doctrinaire theologians, and works only within the limits they are pleased to assign. With the idea of a divinely ordained canon, he associated the idea of a divinely ordained criticism; and thus united science with faith.

From his conception of symbolism there followed for Sabatier a double critical task. On the one hand, he had to set himself to establish, as far as possible, the historical truth, especially as regards the people of Israel, Jesus Christ, and the primitive Church; on the other, having established this truth, he had to endeavour, by means of psychological criticism, to distinguish what in these historical manifestations constitutes the religious truth, the substance of the gospel, from what belongs to the relative, contingent, or variable domain of purely human thought, and depends on the individual capacity, the time, the medium, the temporary circumstance. Sabatier accomplished both tasks with rare power of thought, with the most scrupulous historical straightforwardness, and with the decisive and tactful religious judgment of a man of God and a disciple of Christ. His conclusions may be reduced to these two: he recognised in Jesus Christ, regarded from a religious and moral point of view, *the perfect manifestation of God in man*; and he held that the Gospel of Christ was essentially the proclamation of *salvation by faith, that is, by repentance and heart-surrender to God*, whatever may be our ritual practices or legal works or theological beliefs. In such conclusions we have his reply to the question regarding salvation, so closely allied to the question regarding truth.

It has been one of the great joys of my life to find myself at one with Sabatier in this conception of the two fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion; and this harmony of religious and scientific conviction has contributed in no small degree to seal our friendship.

In his *Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion*, Sabatier has only touched on the doctrine of salvation by faith independently of beliefs. He devotes more attention to it at the close of the excellent book entitled: *Les religions d'autorité et la religion de l'Esprit*, which he left in manuscript,

and for the publication of which he has given instructions. This book, which he concluded a few days before his last illness, but which he had not time formally to revise, is to be published in the course of a few months. We shall thus have one more jewel in our French theological literature.

Our beloved and great Sabatier is dead; but his thought lives with us more than ever. His theology has its friends and its opponents; it will still be matter for discussion for a long time to come. But its progress is apparent; and I am personally convinced that the future belongs to it.

## At the Literary Table.

MR. C. H. KELLY has published at one and the same time two books that go right well together. The one is a thin-paper and abridged edition of *John Wesley's Journal* (2s.). The other is a commentary on the Journal: its title *The Roots of Methodism*, its author W. B. Fitzgerald (2s.). The Commentary is as good reading as the Journal, and there is less of it, though that is of little consequence when the reading is all so good. It was an excellent idea to bind the two volumes alike and publish them together. Buy them together, present them together, read them together: they may well go together and illustrate one another for years to come.

Mr. C. H. Kelly has also now published the second volume of the two-volume popular condensed edition of *The Journal of John Wesley* (3s. 6d.). It is a handsome book; its good round type will please the eyes of the cottager and artisan.

The Temple Bible is now almost finished. Two volumes have to be announced this month—two of the most attractive volumes of the whole series. The Rev. W. B. Stevenson, M.A., edits *Wisdom and the Jewish Apocryphal Writings*, and Professor Sayce edits *Tobit and the Babylonian Apocryphal Writings*. We wish that both writers had been allowed a little more space for their notes. But they have had to fall in line with the idea of the whole series, which is to encourage us to read the books themselves rather than commentaries upon them.

Mr. C. H. Perry has written a volume of *Studies in the Psalms* (Allenson; 2s. 6d. net) as aids to life and devotion. He believes that each of the Psalms is the expression of one thought. As the

heading to each Psalm he expresses that thought in a single word. And his 'Study' consists in bringing that thought out of the Psalm from first to last.

While companies and combinations have in our day been doing their best to translate the Bible into our tongue, one devout and devoted student has worked steadily on into old age, and single-handed has produced a translation that will not suffer by comparison with any other. Just as William Tindale resolved to give the Bible to the people in their own language, so Mr. Ferrar Fenton resolved to give the Bible to the people once again in the language which they now speak. He calls his translation *The Bible in Modern English* (10s.). He has just published the last volume of it, covering the Poetical Books (2s. 6d. net). It is no injustice either to Mr. Fenton or to Tindale to bring their names together. It was long before Tindale's unique service to England and to Christ was recognized; it may be long before men recognize the unique value of Mr. Fenton's translation of the Bible into modern English; but his day will come. Not for public reading just yet, but for private study, for the quickest and easiest way of getting at the meaning of the Bible, this translation will be more and more prized as the years go by. There is no translation of the Bible in English which has so little need of a commentary to explain it. The publishers are Messrs. S. W. Partridge.

Mr. Stockwell is the publisher of many volumes of sermons. He has now begun with the Free Methodist preachers, and has published a volume containing twelve sermons by twelve different preachers, with the portrait of each of the preachers.