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Doctrinal Theology.

WHAT IS THEOLOGY?

Theology has been variously defined; and it is but a matter of course that definitions should differ when the ideas or notions to be defined are not identical. The definition of a science can not cover the idea of an art, and a definition of either can not define what is neither. Thus also certain modern definitions of theology can not consistently agree with ours, since modern scientific theology is not our theology.

There is still another reason why we cannot accept certain modern definitions of theology. A definition may be termed relatively true when it truly exhibits the marks of the object to be defined, even though that object be a perversion of what it should properly be. But when Luthardt defines Theology as "the churchly science of Christianity," this definition is not a true definition even of Luthardt's theology. This theology may be a *science*; but it is certainly not a *churchly* science, being neither of the church, nor by the church, nor for the church, nor in harmony with any church on earth or in heaven. The church as such cannot countenance a theology which ought not to be what it is and is not what it professes to be.

The claim which is most strenuously advanced and most jealously vindicated in behalf of modern theology is that of its *scientific* character and dignity. Even the Roman pontiff falls in line with the time, at least in his language, when in his Encyclical of Aug. 4, 1879, he says: "The perpetual and manifold use of philosophy is required, in order that sacred Theology may obtain the nature, character, and spirit of a true science."¹⁾ That theology should strictly and consistently occupy the standpoint of revelation is met by the objection that "Theology in this form could not lay claim to being scientific."²⁾ It is said to be the duty of theology "to secure for itself recognition and consideration by a character homogeneous with that of the rest of the sciences,"³⁾ and the task of the churches, "to engender in their midst a theology of equal birth with the rest of the academic sciences and entitled to demand at the hands of these the recognition of a science."⁴⁾ So imperative is this demand considered, that it is rendered normative for the determination of the very first fundamental principle of theology. "It will be most to the purpose," says Raebiger, "to determine the relation to revelation into which theology must enter if it would be a science in the true sense of the word and claim to be recognized as such."⁵⁾

But what modern theology boasts as its strength and excellence, we deplore as its weakness and shortcoming. If the German theologian holds that theology must sustain a scientific character, since, by abandoning its place among the sciences, theology would waive its claims for equal recognition in the universities, we do not hesitate to say that the sooner those claims were relinquished, the better for theology and all therein concerned. Theology is not a sister-

1) Perpetuus et multiplex requiritur philosophiae usus, ut sacra Theologia naturam, habitum, ingeniumque verae scientiae suscipiat atque induat. Encycl. *Aeterni Patris*.

2) Raebiger, *Theologic*, p. 121.

3) *Ibid.*

4) *Ibid.* p. 205.

5) *Ibid.* p. 121.

science with Philosophy, Medicine, and Law, and that she should appear in a quadriga with these sciences is more unsightly than what Moses prohibited saying, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together."¹⁾ Even crowning Theology the queen of sciences would be inflicting upon her an honor to which she should not stoop, a degradation and deportation against which she must protest. Being *sui generis*, she is just as much out of place at the head of the class as at the foot of the class.

The unnatural yoking-together of theology with the sciences in the universities was and is in a measure due to abnormal circumstances and conditions in church and state. Paris, the mother and model of mediaeval universities, was at first not an *universitas literarum*, but a school of Theology, as Salerno was a school of Medicine, and Bologna, a school of Law. But being under the sway of the Roman Pontiff wielding the two swords over church and state, and of princes dealing in secular and spiritual investitures, the Doctors very naturally learned to represent the realm of letters, theology and philosophy in the same literary commonwealths, while the church, which should have been the foster-mother of Theology, was held in thralldom by both popes and princes, unmindful of the care of her interests and the management of her affairs. Nor did the church of the Reformation in Germany ever enjoy the good fortune of being constituted as an independent organism in the free exercise of its proper functions, of which the training of theologians for the pulpit and the chair should have ranked among the foremost. The princes, serving as "emergency-bishops" in Luther's days under the stress of papistic hostilities and the incapacity of the people, were also the chief patrons of the universities, and by and by they saw less reason for dissolving than for continuing and confirming the union in which theology was bound up at the high-

1) Deuter. 22, 10.

seats of learning. For the time came when the princes had learned to make the interests of the church subservient to their own political interests, when they claimed as by divine right what pressing necessity under abnormal circumstances had forced upon their fathers. And thus it was that the church became part and parcel of the political machinery, much to the detriment of the church, and Theology remained where it was, much to the detriment of Theology.

More eminently disastrous its being bundled up with the academic sciences has proved to theology because of the importance attached to the universities as scientific workshops rather than professional schools. It has in our day been flatly denied that the university is a school at all. The Professor is not so much a teacher and educator as a man of science occupied in original research, investigation, or speculation, for the advancement or reconstruction of the science he represents. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the man of science to avoid the beaten paths, unless it be with a critical eye and the purpose of scoring up against his predecessors or contemporaries the errors they have committed. Not profound learning and the ability to transmit useful knowledge to hosts of disciples, but to have enriched his science by some new revolutionizing discovery, and to have exploded beyond recovery all the theories at variance with his own, is the true boast of the holder of an academic chair. And here, then, was Theology, side by side with the sciences and represented by one of the four Faculties, in the struggle for academic existence, the Professor of theology in the race with other Professors of Theology, the Professor Ordinarius vying with the Professor Extraordinarius, and both with the Licentiatu Privatum Docens, and all the Theologians with the men of the Philosophical Faculty. Can it be surprising to see Theology stalking along in scientific trappings, preparing to fight Goliath in King Saul's armor, the scientific theologian,

with an emphasis on *scientific*, scanning the horizon in a scientific attitude and with scientific apparatus, bent on discovering some new ruling principle wherewith he might construct a new dogmatic system, a new hypothesis wherewith he might carry on his experiments in higher criticism on a scientific plan and along lines followed by no one before him? It may be safely said that such men as Hofmann, Thomasius, Zetzschwitz, Delitzsch, Kalnis, all of whom had seen better days, would probably never have drifted away so far from their Lutheran moorings, if the academic atmosphere had not furnished the wind to their sails and scientific ambition had not stood at the helm of their theology.

And whither has this theology drifted? An inspiration which is not the inspiration of the Bible; a word of God which is not the *word* of God nor the word of *God*; a God who is not the God of his word; a Trinity which is not a Unity; a Son who is not *the* Son, begotten of the Father from eternity, very God of very God; a Christ who is not *the* Christ, the son of God made of a woman; a Redemption which cannot redeem for want of a Redeemer, God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself; a salvation by grace which is not by grace—such are some of the achievements of scientific theology.

Just how *scientific* such inconsistencies and contradictions as a monotheism with a God in the highest sense of the term and two divine persons of a subordinate type of divinity—which is in fact a tritheistic monotheism—and similar incongruities of modern theology may be, we will not here investigate. What interests us more is, how *theological* this theology is. When Charles Darwin wrote his fundamental work on “The Origin of Species,” he pointed out a multitude of things concerning species; but what he utterly failed to show was the *origin* of species. Modern scientific theology fares even worse. It is either anthropocentric with a pelagianizing anthropology, or theocentric

with a sabellianizing theology, or Christocentric with a nestorianizing or eutychnianizing or arianizing Christology, thus embodying heretical elements long ago condemned by the church in the very principles from which it endeavors to develop its systems. These systems do not only fail to make good what they propose and promise, but actually leaven the whole lump of their theology with their adulterated principles. Mediaeval scholasticism was eclectic, a conglomerate of scriptural, papistical, pagan, Jewish and Mohammedan material massed together in systems resembling certain edifices of the Constantinian and post-Constantinian age, with columns and friezes and sculptures appropriated from the temples and basilicas and bath-houses of pagan architecture, and material quarried for the Christian builder at home and abroad. Modern scholasticism is a web of the spider's own making, spun from its own body, the threads symmetrically arranged from center to border, but of no use in the world save to spider itself and its progeny. The systems of these latter-day schoolmen are like so many polar expeditions, planned on more or less scientific principles and equipped with all manner of nautical and astronomical apparatus, all of them making a record of their exploits and entailing labor and expense, but all of them failing in one thing, the achievement of their ultimate purpose, the discovery of the Pole.

Our theology is *not* a science in the modern sense of the term. Christian theology, or, which is the same, Lutheran theology, considered in concreto, is *an aptitude of the mind, comprising the knowledge and acceptance of divine truth and the ability to instruct others toward such knowledge and acceptance, and to defend such truth against its adversaries*. This definition is not of our own contrivance; neither is it ultimately obtained from our earlier dogmatists; but it is derived from the source of all true theology, the holy Scriptures. Saint Luke gives us the essentials of a theologian in his description and narrative of Apollos,

when he writes: "*And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. Whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaja, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him. Who when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace. For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*"¹⁾ This man, then, was endowed with a *knowledge of divine truth*, being "instructed in the way of the Lord," and "mighty in the Scriptures," and having "the way of God expounded to him more perfectly." But that truth had not entered into his intellect only, but had been *accepted* by him with a willing heart and had set him aglow with the holy fire of faith and spiritual zeal, making him "fervent in the spirit." He was, furthermore, endowed with *ability to instruct others toward the knowledge and acceptance* of the truth of God; he "spake and taught diligently," not his own wisdom, but "the things of the Lord," and thus "helped them much which had believed through grace." And that not only by teaching the truth, but also inasmuch as he "mightily convinced the Jews," not by philosophical argument, but "showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ," thus *defending the truth of God against its adversaries*. Again, St. Paul describes a theologian as "*holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*"²⁾ Here we have in brief the essentials of our definition. The

1) Acts 18, 24—28.

2) Tit. 1, 9.

theologian "has been taught," and thus imbued with *knowledge*, not of a scientific system, but of "the faithful word," the word of God, which is of divine authority and reliability. And he "holds fast" this faithful word, having *accepted* its truth in firm and confiding faith. He is furthermore, "able by sound doctrine to exhort" and "to convince the gainsayers," or, with our definition, to *instruct* others toward the knowledge and acceptance of God's truth, and to *defend* such truth against its adversaries. And this is the description of all those grand primeval theologians of New Testament Christianity, the apostles of Christ. Having been instructed during a triennium in theology by their Master, they were "guided into all truth by the Spirit of truth."¹⁾ They had not only acquired an intellectual knowledge of the truth, but had accepted such truth as truly divine and placed their confidence in it, as Christ says, "They have *known* that all things, whatsoever thou hast given me, *are of thee*; for I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and *they have received them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have *believed* that thou didst send me."²⁾ So do the Acts of the Apostles, and their epistles, and millions in all ages who "believed on Christ through their word,"³⁾ bear witness to their aptness to instruct others toward the knowledge and acceptance of the truth of God and to defend that truth against all manner of assailants even to the present day and to the end of time.

On the other hand, if weighed in the balance of modern theology, all of the "holy men of God" must be found wanting; not one of them can aspire to the dignity of a theologian. In the writings of neither Paul, nor Peter, nor John, do we find an exhibition of the "scientific self-consciousness of the church." Their doctrinal theology is not "developed," or, as Luthardt's professes to be, "repro-

1) John 16, 13.

2) John 17, 7. 8.

3) John 17, 20.

duced from the religious faith of the Christian.”¹⁾ Paul speaks in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth;²⁾ his preaching is “by the word of God,”³⁾ for “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”⁴⁾ Thus also St. Peter would have us take heed not to the self-consciousness of the church, nor to his own self-consciousness, though he had been an eye-witness of the revelation of Christ in Glory, but unto the “more sure word of prophecy, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.”⁵⁾ And what St. John “declares” unto the churches is “the message which he has heard of Christ,”⁶⁾ not the “science of religion,” not the “self-consciousness of the church.” Neither may Luther, the greatest theologian of post-apostolic times, pass muster under the censorship of modern theology. He says: “In theology . . . the beginning is this, and this only, that you hear and believe the word of God. He who will not begin thus will fail and achieve nothing nor preach right, though he had all the world’s wisdom . . . And once more, no one who would do what is meet and right should teach or preach of himself; but he should treat of God’s word, and nothing else.”⁷⁾ Luther too, then, is profoundly ignorant of a theology which “must genetically develop the whole of Christian doctrine from a fundamental unit.”⁸⁾ He says, “He who is well versed and founded in the *text* will be a good and accomplished theologian.”⁹⁾

Second in rank among the theologians of our church is Martin Chemnitz, the “alter Martinus.” But he too must surrender his commission under the new regime. In his *Enchiridion* he proposes the question: “What doctrine or word is a preacher to exhibit to the church?” and his answer is: “He is not to preach his dreams or the thoughts

1) Compendium der Dogmatik, § 5.

3) Rom. 10, 17.

5) 2 Pet. 1, 19.

7) Works, Erl. ed. 48, 147. 148.

9) Erl. 57, 7.

2) 1 Cor. 2, 10.

4) 1 Cor. 2, 11.

6) 1 John 1, 5.

8) Luthardt *ibid.* § 12, 1.

and opinions of his own heart, Jer. 23; neither should he preach doctrines or traditions of men, Is. 29. Mat. 15; but if any man speak in the church of God, let him speak as the oracles of God, 1 Pet. 4.”¹⁾ He furthermore asks: “Where have we and do we find such word of God?” and answers: “God has at sundry times and in divers manners revealed his word, has himself appeared, has moved holy men by his Spirit and inspired unto them his word and spoken through their mouths. Lastly he has spoken through Christ and his Apostles. Heb. 1. 2 Pet. 1. 2 Tim. 3. Luc. 1.”²⁾—And having next asked the question: “Is, then, all that it behooves us to know of God’s word contained in the Scriptures?” his answer is, “Christ says, John 15, ‘All things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you, my Apostles;’ and Paul, an Apostle, says Acts 20, ‘I have not shunned to declare unto you all the council of God.’ Therefore beyond this the Holy Ghost will not reveal any other or new thing through the prelates or councils; for his office is to bring all things to our remembrance, whatsoever Christ has taught. John 14. And although not all the miracles and sermons of the Prophets, of Christ, and of the Apostles, are in detail described, yet the H. Spirit has encompassed in holy writ the sum and substance of the entire doctrine whereof the Church is in need unto faith, whereby eternal life may and must be obtained. John 20, and St. Paul, 2 Tim. 3, attributes to the holy Scriptures two things, the *first*, that it makes a man of God, that is, a preacher and teacher, so perfect that he is thoroughly furnished unto all good works pertaining to the ministry; the *second*, that the holy Scriptures are able to make every Christian wise unto salvation. And as in the Scriptures we have all we need unto eternal life and salvation, it is meet and right that we should not de-

1) Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, ed. Graebner, p. 30.

2) *Ibid.* p. 32.

sire to hear and know anything beside and beyond this in matters of faith.'¹⁾ It thus appears that Chemnitz had in his theology as little use as Luther had for the scientific reproduction of doctrines from the Christian's faith or the self-consciousness of the Church. Their theology was simply scriptural, as was also that of the great theologians of the XVII century, the few flaws in the systems of Gerhard, Calov, Quenstedt, Dannhauer and others being precisely those points in which they suffered themselves to be prompted by certain considerations which had insinuated themselves between the dogmatician's mind and the only legitimate source of Christian doctrine, holy Scripture, the infallible word of God.

Declining, then, in behalf of our orthodox theology the scientific character claimed by modern theology, and asserting simply its scripturalness, we would not, however, be understood to say that our theology is void of plan or principle. We too know of a central or cardinal dogma, that of Justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. But neither has this dogma grown to be what it is by a process of development, nor has "the whole of Christian doctrine been genetically developed" from this doctrine. The central doctrine and the doctrines that radiate about it are all of them found complete in, and taken in all their parts directly from, the written word of God. Neither was the doctrine of Justification made the central doctrine in our theology by theological reasoning, but we give it that place simply because the Scriptures place it there, and it is for this reason that we discountenance the Calvinistic scheme, which awards the central position to the doctrine of the sovereign majesty of God.—We too know of principles in our theology. That the Bible is by verbal inspiration the written word of God, the infallible source and norm of doctrine, is with us a principle so far-reaching that

1) Ibid. p. 32. 33.

its application is perceptible throughout the entire length and breadth of our theology, exegetical, doctrinal, historical, and practical, and distinguishes the orthodox theology of our church from modern scientific theology and all other theologies far more radically and uncompromisingly than homoeopathy and allopathy may differ in and by their principles. But this principle is speculative or constructive neither in its genesis nor in its application, but is itself found whole and complete in the Scriptures and enters into no relation to human reason other than that which enjoins upon reason those *organic* functions which do not add to nor take from or otherwise alter the truth as it is revealed in the written Word. Our theology concedes the dignity of a theological doctrine to no statement which may be derived from a revealed doctrine by a process of reasoning only, but is not itself in all its terms actually taught in holy Scripture. And, again, our theology admits of no elimination or modification of any truth laid down in Scripture because of a seeming incompatibility with some other doctrine also clearly set forth in Scripture. We maintain the doctrines of God's common grace, of Christ's universal redemption, of the general efficacy and resistibility of the means of grace, and conversion by the means of grace thus constituted, because we find these doctrines taught in Scripture. And we likewise maintain the doctrines of man's universal and total depravity and his utter inability to concur in any way or measure toward his conversion, and of the election of the few as being in Christ Jesus a cause of their eternal salvation and everything thereto pertaining, again because we find these doctrines also taught in Scripture, and although there appears to be between them and the doctrines first enumerated a chasm which we can neither fathom nor bridge. We reject as unscriptural and, therefore, untheological, every attempt to reconcile the seemingly incompatible doctrines by modifying or, which is the same, perverting the one or the other. The sub-

stance of every doctrine is a fixed magnitude determined by the texts in which each doctrine is set forth.

Our theology further demands that not only the various theological truths in themselves, but also their relation to each other should be scriptural. Though the various articles of faith may be, *docendi causa*, differently arranged, their internal relation is forever established in revelation, and a change in this relation is a perversion of doctrine. Thus when St. Paul teaches that God has chosen us in Christ,¹⁾ the doctrine of Predestination is thereby shown to presuppose that of Redemption, and not vice versa.

Lastly, our theology, in being scriptural, is also truly *protestant*. Luther struck the key-note of true protestantism and of true theology when he opened the first of his ninety-five theses with the words: "*Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, saying—*" These words were virtually a Declaration of Independence directed against Antichrist, because they were actually an avowal of allegiance to Christ and of obedience and subjection to his word. But that same allegiance and obedience implied no less decided a protest against the rule of reason in matters of faith and doctrine. Luther was prompted and actuated by the same theology when he refused to recant at Worms and when he refused to yield at Marburg. True liberty is not licentiousness in theology any more than it is in social or political life, and the freedom of thought which true protestantism claims and concedes is freedom to think the thoughts of God revealed in the word of God, human authority of any kind to the contrary notwithstanding. A. G.

1) Eph. 1, 4.