

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

WE have thus attempted to define the salient features of those types of Christianity which have attained importance by embodying themselves in a great ecclesiastical organisation, or by dominating wide spheres of theological thinking. In conclusion, something may be said of the comparative value of these types, and also of the conditions of the larger task of Dogmatic Theology to which the study of the nature of the Christian religion is a preliminary contribution.

In the first place, the survey which we have made leaves the impression that, in spite of the ecclesiastical and theological divisions of Christendom, there is a groundwork of the Christian religion which is traceable in the divergent forms, and which invests all with an unmistakable family likeness. It may also be observed that forces have been at work in history which ensured that divergence from the true type should not proceed beyond a certain length. Whenever a process of corruption or disintegration advanced so far as to threaten loss of identity, a protest was raised against the loss and defacement, and a successful attempt was made to restore its purity or integrity. The service rendered in the Reformation was to purify the decadent Christianity of the Middle Ages by a return to the Christianity attested in the original sources. And similarly the

main significance of modern theology, as represented by Schleiermacher and Ritschl, lay in the fact that it revolted against the disfigurement and weakening which Christianity had suffered at the hands of Rationalism, and that it sought to recover a larger measure of the blessings and of the power of the Christian religion.

Of the types of Christianity which have been passed under review, there are two which can be somewhat confidently set down as pathological. Roman Catholicism is a pathological development from patristic Christianity, Rationalism from Protestant Christianity. The epithet is justified by the fact that they both have the effect of impairing the individuality and vitality of Christianity by humanising experiments on a divine religion. But they took different ways to the same end. The radical vice of Romanism was that it sought to enrich the Christian religion by importing into it theories and practices which belonged to an earlier and a lower religious plane, and whose additional value for faith and life was only illusory. The contrary vice of Rationalism was that it sought to amend Christianity by impoverishing it. It is also an important point of contrast, as was already remarked, that Roman Catholicism makes too little of the power of truth in its reliance on the system of sacramental grace, and that Rationalism makes too much of ideas in treating them as a substitute for the power of the Holy Ghost.

But next, it is impossible to regard the type of patristic orthodoxy as other than a one-sided representation of the substance of the Christian religion. The view has been taken in these lectures that its work of dogmatic definition was of real religious value—con-

cerned as it was to safeguard the Christian idea of God as revealed in Christ, while no alternative definitions of the Godhead and of the Person of Christ have so far been framed which have been widely accepted as fitted to meet the demand which is made upon God in Christ as the ground of the Christian salvation. But it is equally clear that the patristic Church showed a want of the sense of proportion, and also of insight, in its apprehension of the Christian religion as a whole. Its conception of the religious blessings was sensibly vitiated by the influence of the ascetic ideal, which led to the exclusion or under-valuation of much that is embraced in the purpose of God to enrich the world by the establishment therein of His divine Kingdom. More particularly, in its attitude towards the all-important topic of the conditions of salvation, patristic orthodoxy was indefinite or superficial. The bearing of the work of Christ upon justification or the forgiveness of sins was not investigated with any thoroughness before Anselm. It is a more serious defect that the theories of the subjective condition of forgiveness were handled in a form which on the one hand compromised the doctrines of grace, and on the other hand fostered a type of thinking which is one of the most pestilent of the heresies. In one connection the Gospel was compromised by conjoining evangelical obedience with faith as the ground of justification. In another connection it seemed to teach that the faith which is accepted for salvation is the intellectual appropriation of the dogmas of the Trinity and the Person of Christ, and that heretical aberrations of opinion in regard to these mysteries entails the forfeiture of eternal salvation.

It was the signal achievement and the permanent

of revelation in regard to the experiences which follow death in the case of believers, while the intermediate condition, and the ultimate destiny of the wicked, seem to be subjects in which we are thrown back on inferential reasoning (that may seem inconclusive) from the revealed nature of God on the one hand, and from the facts of sin and of human character on the other.

At another point in the traditional system of Protestant doctrine there is a widespread feeling of discomfort, and the felt need of a fresh manipulation of the material. In the treatment of the topics connected with the individual appropriation of salvation—the *Ordo Salutis* of Dogmatics—there was traced a type of religious experience which was assumed to be the normal, and indeed the only legitimate type. But while in the Protestant theory there was only recognised a form and sequence of religious experiences which was modelled on a religious history such as that of Augustine, Luther, and the evangelical saints, in practice it was recognised that there were many among the best of ordinary Christians—identifiable as such by a Christian character, and an underlying faith and penitence—whose experiences could not easily be fitted into the stereotyped scheme. At this point there is much room for revised work on the basis of a fuller study, not only of New Testament psychology, but also of the concrete manifestations in modern life of Christian experience and character.

The view that has been taken of the content of the Gospel and its implications as the sum of assured Christian truth undoubtedly makes the detailed work of Dogmatic Theology more difficult, and also makes the secondary doctrines less stable. In religion and

theology we instinctively desire to be sure of everything; and there is a natural dislike of a theology which handles any doctrinal topic with indecision, and which dismisses it with a modest claim to speculative probability, or even with a confession of ignorance. But in the long run it can only be a gain if theology makes clear that it operates at different points with varying degrees of certainty; and that it draws a very definite distinction between the central doctrinal content of Christianity, of whose truth it has an absolute persuasion, and those secondary doctrines which have been provocative of so much debate because they had the character of problems, and which were really a bequest from revelation to the inquiring and speculative activity of the Christian mind.

The central content of the Christian revelation, the gospel which forms the soul and power of the Christian religion, is on an altogether different footing from the speculative utterances made by theology in the outlying provinces of religious thought. It passes down from generation to generation under the protection of experience and of God. It is accredited afresh from age to age by the fact that it is an engine for doing spiritual work of the most valuable kind, and that those who make use of it find that it makes good its promises. It is also authenticated by a conviction of its truth wrought in the hearts of those who live by it, which shows such strength, tenacity and energising activity that they confidently interpret it as a gift of God through the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Religion, we are told by the writer to the Hebrews, has its disciplines of dislodgment, but it is to the end that the things which cannot be shaken may stand out more clearly in their changeless grandeur and their

immovable strength. The mind is ever interested in novelties; but the heart ever seeks the permanent and unchangeable, and is assured that its quest is not vain, according to the song of our pilgrimage:—

‘His truth at all times firmly stood  
And shall from age to age endure.’