

# THE RULE OF FAITH

BEING

THE BAIRD LECTURE FOR 1905

BY THE REV.

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## PREFACE

THIS book is an enlarged and amended version of six lectures which were delivered in 1905 on the Baird Foundation under the title of 'The Substance and Standard of Christian Doctrine.' I am indebted to the Baird Trustees for the forbearance which they have shown in regard to delay in publication. My main excuse for the procrastination is that I wished to deal more thoroughly with a large subject than was possible in the brief course of lectures originally delivered, and my chief regret is that the improvement has not been commensurate with the delay. The book as it stands has a certain definiteness of scope as a study in the Prolegomena to Dogmatics. The short title which is now adopted is one which was naturalised both in Patristic and Protestant Theology, and the phrase has had a variety of scope which makes it legitimate to use it to cover the discussions alike as to the seat and the substance of doctrine. I hope that the Appendices may be of use to those

who have to study the important questions raised under this rubric of Fundamental Theology. My thanks are due to Mr. G. S. Duncan, M.A. (Edin.), B.A. (Cantab.), for help in revising the proofs, and for the compilation of the index.

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EDINBURGH.

## CONTENTS

	PAGES
INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	1-28

### A.—THE SEAT OF DOCTRINE

#### CHAPTER I

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEORY . . . . .	31-56
-------------------------------------	-------

#### CHAPTER II

THE PROTESTANT THEORY . . . . .	57-77
---------------------------------	-------

#### CHAPTER III

THE SCHOOL OF THE SPIRIT . . . . .	78-91
------------------------------------	-------

## CHAPTER IV

	PAGES
THE RATIONALISTIC PRINCIPLE . . . . .	92-119

## CHAPTER V

THE CRITERION OF FEELING. . . . .	120-140
-----------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER VI

BIBLICAL ECLECTICISM . . . . .	141-164
--------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION . . . . .	165-173
----------------------------------	---------

## B.—THE SUBSTANCE OF DOCTRINE

## CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION . . . . .	177-202
--	---------

## CHAPTER II

THE ORTHODOX INTERPRETATION . . . . .	203-235
---------------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER III

	PAGES
THE GENIUS OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM . . .	236-263

## CHAPTER IV

THE GOSPEL OF PROTESTANTISM . . .	264-300
-----------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER V

THE DISTINCTIVE TESTIMONY OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES . . .	301-314
---	---------

## CHAPTER VI

RATIONALISTIC THEOLOGY . . .	315-343
------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER VII

THE THEOLOGY OF SCHLEIERMACHER . . .	344-365
--------------------------------------	---------

## CHAPTER VIII

THE RITSCHLIAN REVISION . . .	366-388
CONCLUDING REMARKS . . .	389-396

## APPENDICES

	PAGES
A. TERTULLIAN ON SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION . . . . .	397-398
B. THE VINCENTIAN RULE . . . . .	398-399
C. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC THEORY OF THE RULE OF FAITH . . . . .	399-403
D. THE CRITERIA OF APOSTOLIC TRADITIONS . . . . .	403-404
E. LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE . . . . .	405-407
F. WESTMINSTER DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE . . . . .	407-410
G. BARCLAY'S PROPOSITIONS . . . . .	410-412
H. THE THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF SCHLEIERMACHER	412-417
I. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE RITSCHLIAN THEOLOGY . . . . .	417-422
J. THE DISTINCTION OF FUNDAMENTAL AND NON- FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES . . . . .	423-428
INDEX . . . . .	429-439

## INTRODUCTORY

THE Christian Church has always claimed to be in possession of a body of truth which excels in dignity and value all else that is called by the name of knowledge. To faith this inheritance of truth is matter of astonishment,<sup>1</sup> and even to unbelief it may well appear to challenge notice as one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the intellectual history of mankind. Christian doctrine has at least four features which peremptorily arrest attention.

To begin with, Christian thought embraces the most important of the subjects which have aroused the curiosity of the human mind. It pronounces on such vast and difficult themes as the being, the attributes and the purposes of God; the origin of the universe and of humanity; the principles of the divine government of the world; the spiritual constitution, the chief end and the destiny of man; and also the provisions framed by God, whether ordinary or extraordinary, for carrying His purposes into execution. Next, this knowledge is conceived as possessing a practical value which is without a parallel in the field of human experience. It appears as truth which does work of a kind that is generally admitted to be pre-eminently worth doing, and also to be beyond the powers of any rival agency that works for human well-being. It is

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xi. 33; 1 Cor. ii. 7-10.

held to constitute a saving provision, which, if appropriated and acted upon, has the effect of establishing a filial relationship with God, of re-creating and remoulding character, and of conveying a promise of life beyond the grave in conditions of perfected holiness and blessedness. Once more, a unique origin is claimed for Christian knowledge as being in a peculiar and immediate way a gift of God. Ultimately, no doubt, all truth is from God; but it has been the persistent faith of Christendom that the verities of the Christian system, those especially which have efficacy against sin, sorrow and death, have been derived from a special revelation, and are to be placed in a different category from the hard-won gains of human observation and reflection. And lastly, Christian doctrine has been welcomed by the human mind with a striking receptiveness and confidence. It has been received with lively gratitude, and it has been held with a tenacious grasp. Whatever be the true definition of faith, it is no essential mark of its Christian form that it operates with a low degree of assurance; for doctrines of the Creeds and Confessions have seemed to many in all ages to be the very antithesis of guess-work and mere probable opinion, to take rank among the most certain of the facts of existence, and to be of such assured value as to justify any sacrifice that might be called for in their witness and defence.

No doubt the history of Christian thought has had its striking vicissitudes. The spirit of theology has been somewhat capricious—so that it has sometimes happened that the controversies of an earlier age have seemed to its successor hardly to repay the trouble of trying to understand them. In recent times the general mind has been diverted to fields of literary and historical

investigation ; and an impression has been fostered that theology, forgoing the quest of absolute truth, must content itself with inquiring what men believed in the classic ages of faith, and on what grounds they formed and expressed their convictions. But even in a time when doctrine might seem decadent, when systematic treatises have fallen into discredit, and a large part of the traditional material has lost its power of persuasion and appeal, testimony is still borne to the paramount interest of doctrine by the minute and exhaustive work that continues to be done in every field that has the remotest bearing upon the records of Christian origins and upon the development of the Christian Creed. It may also be observed that even in such situations a few truths collected at random by the pulpit or the family from the Christian tradition have continued to serve multitudes as the basis of their philosophy of existence, and as a gospel for life and death which they find to be beyond the reach of cavil. There is evidence, moreover, that the eclipse of doctrine cannot be more than a temporary episode in the history of the Church ; for the religious revival is a recurring phenomenon of history, and it has ever been accompanied by a revival of theological reflection in which a special group of truths has been brought into prominence, and has been re-appropriated by a measure of independent thinking and of fresh expression. A general survey of the history of Christianity leaves a profound impression of the power of a system of thought which has sometimes dominated, and has always enriched, the thinking of philosophical schools ; which has proved to be capable of giving to common folk and to children a working theory of the order of things and of their chief end ; and which has been prescribed by their rulers to empires

and kingdoms as the surest guide in their outlook upon existence and upon the path of duty. It lays such a spell upon the human mind that the Christian view of the world often survives as the chief stimulus even of the minds which reject it, and deserves more credit than any other factor for delivering them from intellectual stagnation.

Along with this notable inheritance, however, there has been transmitted to the Church a persistent problem. While the Church has had an ineradicable conviction that it possesses by special revelation a great treasure of wisdom and of knowledge, it has been troubled by controversy as to the precise repository in which the divine gift has been placed, and as to the method by which it is to be laid hold of and made available for human wants. It has found itself somewhat in the position of a man, who, falling heir to a fortune, is not altogether certain as to how much belongs to the estate, and as to the exact steps to be taken to claim and to realise his wealth. The question in brief is, what is the proximate source from which we collect the special Christian knowledge which is held to be derived from God as its primary source, and how is the source known to be trustworthy? For a variety of reasons this question had to be faced. To begin with, Christian faith has its abode in a mental constitution which harbours intellectual cravings and demands, and the latter would of themselves compel us to raise the question as to the nature and management of the source from which Christian knowledge is drawn. But in addition, the question has been pressed to the forefront from age to age by the external and the domestic conflicts of theology; and not least at the present day, whether we consider the challenge of non-Christian

thought, the clash of ecclesiastical systems, or the discord of theological schools, do we find ourselves forced back on the fundamental issue as to the nature and the strength of the foundation on which the Church stands in its profession and defence of the doctrine which it proclaims as revealed truth.

## I

The need for justifying the source and criterion of Christian knowledge has emerged in clamant form whenever the Christian Church has found itself in conflict with disbelief. In three periods in particular it has been called on to give reasons why its professed wealth of divine and saving knowledge should not be discounted as an aggregate of superstitions and illusions. In the patristic period it had to make its claim good against Judaism, and also against the religion and the philosophy of Greece and Rome. In the eighteenth century it was challenged to prove that anything which was true in its doctrine was also new, and that anything in it which was new was also true. In the nineteenth century it encountered still more radical opposition. Science taught that cosmical doctrines which had been supposed to be guaranteed by revelation were not in accordance with the facts of the universe, and it partially identified itself in consequence with naturalism and agnosticism. Historical investigation made it appear that the records of revelation contained a large human element, and that Christian doctrine, in the course of its development, had been mixed up with the wisdom of this world, and had borrowed freely from its reflections and speculations. In particular, modern philosophy busily occupied itself with a task of which

the method and the results alike were of doubtful omen for theology. Its special interest was in the question as to the nature and range of human knowledge; and it undertook to review, without regard to prepossessions or fear of consequences, the limits of man's cognitive powers, the origin of his ideas, and the validity of the accepted notions about the world, the self and God. Even when the result of the inquiry was a vindication of our title to a knowledge of transcendental reality, the positive statements were apt to be halting and meagre upon certain issues—such as the personality of God and the immortality of the soul—which from the religious standpoint are absolutely vital. The mind which has undergone the modern discipline of philosophic doubt is not predisposed to believe that the full and precise propositions about a realm of transcendental being and powers, which are propounded by theology, are capable of being authenticated as a real enlargement of the stock of human knowledge. Further, as it is the business of philosophy to do its best to solve ultimate questions without any reliance on an assumed revelation, it was inevitable that the special conditions under which it did its work were taken to supply the measure of the real and credible, even in the religious sphere. As the result of this combination of factors, Christian faith is now confronted by a world of culture which represents every shade of sympathy intermediate between whole-hearted belief and patronising tolerance, and also of every degree of opposition ranging from deistic criticism to materialistic dogmatism and agnostic contempt. In such conditions the question emerges with perhaps unparalleled urgency—What is the precise source of the reputed knowledge concerning the problems of exist-

ence which bears the Christian stamp, and why should it be taken on trust?

In responding to the challenge to prove its possession of valid knowledge Apologetics has had a choice between two lines of procedure, which have also frequently been combined. One method has been to attempt to establish the authority of a particular instrument or intermediary of revelation, and to demand acceptance of the doctrines and provisions of the Christian system out of deference to the proved trustworthiness of the agent by which they have been transmitted. The older school of apologists mainly followed this line—for which the precedent was given in apostolic thought<sup>1</sup>—and undertook to prove that in the Scriptures, or in the Apostles, or in the Christ who was foretold by prophecy and accredited by miracles, we possess a witness or witnesses whose authority commends the message as worthy of implicit trust. But while this type of argument cannot become wholly superfluous, since Christianity could not survive the discredit of the witnesses that have made it known to the later world, it has become increasingly clear that Christianity makes its way and holds its own by reason of the content of its message, and its demonstration of power, rather than in virtue of its external credentials. It seems true to the facts of experience to say that the message reflects authority upon those who transmitted it, rather than that to their testimony it owes its credibility. The alternative mode of argument, accordingly, has been to maintain that the Christian system, apart from its guarantee by a transmitting authority, carries its own evidence of being true, and also that in its unique content and importance it gives evidence of

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 22; Rom. i. 4; John xii. 37.

being in a unique sense divine. This argument, also, is deeply embedded in the New Testament. Our Lord's Synoptic teaching for the most part proceeds upon the footing that His words would find their way without question into the unprejudiced mind and the uncorrupted heart. In the Fourth Gospel it is emphatically taught that good men readily believe in Christ and His words; while St. Paul regarded the Gospel as working irresistible conviction in those who made trial of its provisions in the obedience of faith.<sup>1</sup> In the typical modern contributions to Apologetics ever increasing stress has been laid upon the consideration that Christianity shines by its own light and prevails by its own might, and that its best defence consists in the believing exposition of its inspiring and energising truths.

It will, however, be observed that the apologetic procedure which bases the case for Christianity upon its self-evidencing truth and power—relegating the so-called external evidences to a subordinate position, or even discounting them—is a method which presupposes a preliminary task of some difficulty. The Christian apologist has two tasks to face—to define the position which he desires to prove, and to develop the argument by which he seeks to prove it. And the difficulty of the apologist who works on modern lines is to frame a *thesis probanda* which will be sufficiently definite, and which can reckon on general acceptance. The thesis of the older apologists fulfilled these conditions, being formulated in such propositions as that the Scriptures are inspired writings which are entirely worthy of credit, or that the Apostles were competent and honest witnesses, or that Christ was shown to be

<sup>1</sup> John viii. 47; Rom. viii. 16, 17. Cf. John vii. 17.

the Son of God by the miraculous element in His life. On the other hand the effectiveness of the newer Apologetic is impaired by the fact that, while there is fairly general agreement as to the method of proof, there is serious disagreement as to the precise scope of the proposition to be proved. It is widely held that the proposition to be established is the truth of the Christian revelation, or of the Christian religion; but this is found to be compatible with very divergent views as to what is the authentic content of revelation, and what is the substance of the Christian religion. It is doubtful if apologetic treatises are much read outside of theological circles; but if they do penetrate to the world of unbelief, that world might forcibly retort that apologists should come to an understanding among themselves as to what the Christian religion is before they undertake to prove to non-Christians that it is true. Certain at least it is that nothing is more urgently needed as the presupposition of an effective defence of Christianity than a better agreement as to the essential content of the Christian religion, and as to the proper method of ascertaining it.

## II

The divisions of the Christian Church have also brought into marked prominence the problem as to the repository and criterion of Christian knowledge. Each of the great sections of organised Christendom exhibits some diversity of theory as to the channel by which revealed truth has been mediated and by which it is guaranteed. Differences on this head had something to do, if not with creating, at least with widening and perpetuating, the breach between Greek and Latin Christianity. In the chief points of principle, indeed,

the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church are at one—it is agreed that revelation has been transmitted by the twofold channel of Scripture and tradition, and that there is an ecclesiastical organ which formulates the deposit of revealed truth with binding authority. On the other hand the Greek Church disputes the claim of the Papacy to a unique prerogative in the administration of doctrine, and it regards the later developments of Roman dogma as unauthorised. It was, however, at the Reformation that a conflict of views as to the nature and management of the Rule of Faith elevated the question to the position of a dominating issue. Protestantism threw out a challenge to the Roman Church which impugned at many points its system of doctrine, of discipline and of worship, and it soon appeared that there was a radical conflict of theory as to the standard by which its specific features were to be tested and valued. If, as the Protestants contended, the sole appeal was to Scripture, it was easy to show that much in the Roman system was corruption or excrescence. If tradition, as Rome held, was equally with Scripture a channel of the original revelation, it was evident that Protestantism was to be condemned as a mutilated form of Christianity.

Among the Churches ranking as Protestant the view taken of the Rule of Faith has also been to some extent a dividing factor. The alienation of the Reformed Church from the Lutheran was at least confirmed by a difference of attitude towards religious authority. The Lutheran Church was content to retain traditional elements so long as they were not in proved conflict with Scripture, while the Churches of the Reformed group acted on the rigorist canon that express Scriptural warrant was required to justify any-

thing which entered into the staple of the system of doctrine or worship, or which materially affected the government of the household of God. In this matter the Church of England associated itself with the Lutheran rather than with the Reformed maxim. Not only did it conserve much in worship and constitution which was traditional rather than Scriptural, but in the field of theology its typical thinkers have agreed with the Greek Church that the œcumenical Councils of the early centuries had a commission to interpret dogma with finality, and they find no form of dogmatic proof so congenial as that which is built up out of the testimonies of the Fathers. A radical breach with the Protestant principle was made by Quakerism, whose theory of the supremacy of the inner light forced it into a position of ecclesiastical isolation. Within the pale of Protestantism various modifications of the theory of the norm of doctrine have been propounded; but as these have commonly been held in conjunction with a protestation of loyalty to the fundamental Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture, the theological schools in which they have been promulgated have stopped short of asserting themselves in ecclesiastical schism. Evidence, however, is not wanting that on this issue—on which contemporary opinion covers the whole ground between the old Protestant orthodoxy and an almost unqualified rationalism—theological passion may in the near future break out with disruptive energy, and may prove even stronger than the irenical tendencies which have been making for the consolidation of Protestant Christianity.

Important and far-reaching, however, as has been the influence of conflicting theories as to the Rule of Faith, it would be a mistake to conceive that differences

of opinion on this head were the primary cause of the great ecclesiastical divisions. It is superficially plausible to say that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism differ in their conception of the doctrinal content of Christianity because they operate with different conceptions of the source and norm of doctrine, but in reality they maintain different views of the Rule of Faith because they have put a different interpretation upon essential features of the Christian religion. The prior and governing fact was a conviction that the system of divine and saving truth had been found, understood and applied; and the theory which was adopted as to the repository and test of truth was that which best supported and justified the conception that had been formed of the essential nature and content of Christianity. In saying that the interpretation of the essence of Christianity has ever moulded the theory as to the norm of Christian doctrine, there is of course no suggestion of insincerity. The Roman Catholic who believed in the absolute truth of Roman Catholicism was constrained also to believe that, if the Scriptures alone do not support the system in its entirety, there must be other equally good witnesses that supply the want. Similarly, the Protestant who found much in the Roman Catholic system that seemed to him to be false or degrading inevitably repudiated the authorities that were alleged in its support. From other periods of Church History there comes evidence that that theory of the norm was accepted as true which best supported what was believed on other grounds to be divine truth. The attitude of the Fathers as to the respective authority of Scripture and Tradition is somewhat fluctuating: the settled point for them was that a particular

interpretation of Christianity which ensured to it the value of a great salvation was the substance of revealed truth; and when confronted by heresies which seemed to rob it of this character they laid the stress on Scripture or Tradition according as each best served them for the time in maintaining what they were persuaded of as the truth of God.<sup>1</sup> Still more clearly did the argumentation of the heretical sects show the dependence of the theory of authority on the conception previously formed of the essentials of Christianity. When worsted in an appeal to Scripture, we are told, they fell back on an oral tradition, and when confuted by the evidence of an authentic tradition, they fell back on a revised conception of Scriptural authority.<sup>2</sup> Similarly the Quaker mind, believing itself to possess a larger measure of revealed truth than could be extracted from the written Word, developed a theory of the inner light which gave it an apparent title to hold its new-found possessions with a good conscience. Socinianism professed to work with the old Protestant theory that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith; but when it was proved that its interpretation of Christianity was unbiblical it shifted to a rationalistic theory of the standard of doctrine, rather than revert to an orthodox system of doctrinal matter. The observation thus made is a confirmation of the conclusion reached in the previous section, that the question of most vital importance for theology is to reach a satisfactory definition of the essential content of the Christian religion. Were this generally agreed on, the question as to the source and norm of doctrine would be far on the way to settle itself.

<sup>1</sup> For evidence see the materials collected by Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, 1853, i. 368 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 2.

## III

The problem of the proximate source and norm of Christian knowledge is also raised in persistent form in the history of modern Protestant theology. In this history a leading motive was dissatisfaction with the earlier method of conceiving and administering the repository of doctrine, and a belief that it was possible to erect the system of religious truth on a firmer foundation. It may indeed be observed that every group of thinkers which ranks as a theological school has something characteristic in its conception of the source of doctrine, or in its way of administering it. This may be illustrated from the schools of British theology as recognised and designated in current speech. The Evangelical School works on the whole with the orthodox Protestant conception of Scripture as the revealed code of doctrine and morals, and also its own sufficient interpreter; the High Church School depends on the ancient and undivided Church as the authorised interpreter of the deposit of revealed truth; while the Liberal School is generally describable as magnifying the importance of the revelation which has been given through reason and conscience, and as labouring to bring Christian doctrine within the limits of the intelligible and the practical. It is, however, in the Lutheran Church that the really fresh, thorough and important thinking in this field has been done, and that the task has been systematically essayed of re-editing the doctrinal material in accordance with modified theories as to the basis of religious knowledge. The most important chapter in the modern history of theology is that which is bounded by the work of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, and in its most conspicuous aspect this is

the story of the wrestling of modern theology with the problem of the Rule of Faith.

1. The situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as it presented itself to the devout German mind, was that the three classic theories of the Rule of Faith—the Roman Catholic, the old-Protestant and the rationalistic—had broken down, while yet there was a Christian faith which properly refused to be disinherited of the spiritual wealth to which it had been served heir. The question was, Is it still possible to lay the foundations, and to find the materials of a scientific theology? The first attempt to do the work under these conditions was made by Schleiermacher. It is obvious that just as a general scepticism, trying how far it can go, comes upon a barrier in the fact that it thinks, so a provisional religious scepticism encounters an incontestable reality in the fact that mankind is in possession of religious feelings. There is, now, a gamut of observable religious feeling, ranging from a vague sense of dependence on a Supreme Being to the intense and varied experiences of the saint, and it is also matter of observation that these feelings are closely bound up with religious beliefs. It is, further, the business of science to describe, to explain, to systematise; and the method of Schleiermacher promised to fulfil scientific requirements in handling this subject-matter. He undertook to formulate and to reduce to system the beliefs current in the Lutheran Church of his time, and he furnished a genetic explanation of them by tracing the different groups of doctrines to their source in a variety of religious feelings. Devout feeling was thus treated as the ultimate source of religious doctrine, and it also served as its criterion, since the perfection of any doctrinal statement was held to depend on the

success with which it expresses and interprets the feeling from which its thoughts were originally derived.

The school of Schleiermacher has been large and enduring if we reckon into it all modern theologians who have shared his starting-point, and sought to extract a theology from the data of religious experience. But as tested by theological result, it has been a house divided against itself, as well as against its master. His own elaborated system has seemed to some to contain more positive doctrine, to others to contain much less, than can be inferred from the phenomena of religious feeling. In the hands of one group his method has issued in the reduction of Christian doctrine to the barest residuum of knowledge, and that of a somewhat shadowy kind. In this succession the outstanding contributions are the *Glaubenslehre* of Alexander Schweizer, which exhibits a curious combination of evangelicalism and rationalism, and the work of Sabatier and other members of the Paris School, whose point of view may be expressed by saying that God vouchsafes religious experiences, but has left it to man to make his theology. Of the same type is James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in which the content of theology shrinks to a probable opinion that there is a higher spiritual world with which man can cultivate relations, and within which our prayers do some work. Another succession of thinkers, operating from the same base, have believed it possible to re-discover and re-establish the cardinal doctrines of historic Christianity. One notable representative of this school was Hofmann, who defined his method by saying that the theologian finds his subject-matter in himself regarded as a Christian.<sup>1</sup> Frank of Erlangen in his systems of *Christliche Gewissheit*<sup>2</sup> and *Christliche*

<sup>1</sup> *Der Schriftbeweis*, 1857, i. p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> E. Tr. *System of the Christian Certainty*, i., 1886.

*Wahrheit* also laboured to show that the regenerate experience can be made to yield and substantiate the main doctrines of the Catholic and Lutheran tradition.

2. The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of new schools of philosophical theology. It is no doubt true that in principle these schools occupy the same ground as the old Rationalism, in that they bring the doctrines of faith to the touchstone of reason; but there was greater willingness on the part of the philosophical masters to admit the rationality of the distinctive Christian doctrines, while some of the disciples were also able to make room for an additional principle of Christian knowledge. In striking contrast with eighteenth-century Rationalism, it was held that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, which had been declared offensively irrational, enshrine profound truths of a speculative or practical kind. The pioneer contribution was Kant's treatise on *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, in which he undertook to show that Christian doctrine, when intelligently expounded, tallied roughly with the main positions of his own ethico-religious system. It is, however, less by his exposition of the essential content of Christian doctrine than by his criticism of reason, and his conception of the nature and grounds of the knowledge claimed by faith, that Kant has left a deep impress on subsequent theology. Still more widely felt was the influence of Hegel, whose general point of view was that philosophy and religion have both been advancing, under the guidance of a rational principle, towards a goal; and that Christianity as the absolute religion, and Hegelianism as the final philosophy, have been endeavouring to think and to say the same things

in different ways. Hegel's own view of the substantial accord of his system with Christianity has been adopted by the main body of his British disciples. In particular Principal Caird's course of Gifford Lectures<sup>1</sup> may be cited as an illustration of the sense of illumination and of intellectual relief which is afforded by Hegelian thought in the handling of doctrines which the Church has often sought to impose upon the mind as mysteries to be humbly and blindly received. In Germany Hegelianism gave an impetus to a new doctrinal activity, and supplied the intellectual basis of contributions of high intellectual rank, which include the dogmatic work of Strauss and Pfleiderer, and reach the acme of scientific achievement in the *Christliche Dogmatik* of Biedermann. It is distinctive of this German group that its members conceived modern philosophy, as mediated through Hegel, to issue in a pantheistic rather than in a theistic view of the world, with the consequence that the supernatural was ruled out from the agencies at work in the universe, while the Christian hope of personal immortality was belittled or denied. In consequence they found it increasingly difficult—Strauss at an early stage had pronounced it impossible—to hold that the residuum of abstract thought which resulted from the criticism of dogma could be honestly proffered to the Church as the substance of its faith. In any case the original promise of service to theology was crossed by the discovery that the ultimate tendency of the system was interpreted by some of its ablest representatives to be, not the rescue, but the discredit and subversion of the Christian view of the world.

3. Concurrently with the work of the experimental

<sup>1</sup> *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 2 vols., 1899.

and the philosophical schools, and partly as a result of it, the conviction revived and deepened that the path of safety lay in a return, at least in principle, to an earlier standpoint. With the theology of feeling tending to evaporate into contributions towards religious psychology and pathology, and philosophical theology at issue with itself as to the doctrinal substance both of philosophy and theology, it was naturally felt that Christian thought would do wisely to fall back on the historical datum of the revelation of God in Christ, and on its Scriptural deposit and commentary. It was realised that it is only when theology takes seriously the fact of a revelation that it abides in its Father's house, and finds that it has bread enough and to spare. The later period, accordingly, witnessed the rise of a number of schools which made a common profession of founding on the Christian revelation, and of operating with a Scriptural standard of truth. This return to Scripture took place in various forms and degrees. In the Lutheran Church there arose a new Confessional School, represented by Philippi,<sup>1</sup> which rehabilitated in its main features the theology of the orthodox divines of the seventeenth century. The parallel in Reformed Theology is the monumental treatise of Charles Hodge,<sup>2</sup> who, though holding that Scripture is its own interpreter, was manifestly influenced by a confessional norm, and nowhere deviated from the interpretation of the content of Scripture which is embodied in the Creeds and in the Westminster Confession.

The general impression which was left by the theological work of modern times was that it was no longer

<sup>1</sup> *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, 6 Bde., 1854-79.

<sup>2</sup> *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., 1872.

possible to regard the Scriptures as a storehouse of texts which communicated supernatural knowledge on every matter to which they could be shown to be relevant, which could be pieced together into an elaborate whole as the system of revealed truth, and which had already been adequately interpreted and articulated in the ecclesiastical symbols. For one thing it had become clear that no school or system of theology ever existed which had used the whole Bible as authoritative Word of God, and unfolded its total content in a comprehensive system of faith and morals. The Reformers themselves did not do so, but selected the Pauline scheme of doctrine and the Johannine theology as the quintessence of Scripture, and they only utilised the rest of the complex biblical material in so far as it could be identified with the evangelical scheme, or could be made use of as an instructive and edifying addition. It had also become apparent, in the cultivation of Biblical Theology, that there is no absolutely uniform system of religious and moral ideas traceable throughout Scripture, and that the Canon is really the record of a process of revelation and of education in which religious knowledge grew to more and more, and in which ethical knowledge advanced from moderate levels of work-a-day virtue to the loftiest ideals of purity and love. From this established fact of a development it followed that a standard had to be sought whereby to value and control the manifold contents of Scripture. It could be honestly affirmed that Scripture was the supreme rule of faith, but with the qualification that the real standard was one which, while furnished by Scripture, was also needed for the interpretation and valuation of Scripture. It was found that the assertion of the authority of Scripture needed to be

supplemented by a definition of a particular content of Scripture for which normative authority was claimed. There are, however, different methods that have been followed in the attempt to establish an intra-scriptural norm, and we may fix attention on two types—that which discovers in Scripture an authority which vouches for a divine message, and that which regards the authority as attaching to a limited message of which Scripture is the repository.

(a) The first type of thought is widely held in the form that Christ and His Apostles are authoritative exponents of the word of revelation, and that all which they designed to teach touching faith and morals is absolutely trustworthy. Others, impressed with the secondary character of apostolic Christianity, and holding that the original message was seriously modified in Paulinism, have elevated to a supreme position the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, and have employed this as the norm for the interpretation and correction of the rest of the canonical literature. This latter theory has strongly appealed to many as the most probable solution of the difficulties touching the doctrinal standard which have been described as the crisis of Protestantism.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The other method by which an intra-scriptural norm has been won has been to fasten upon a particular self-authenticating message of Scripture as embodying the essential element of the Christian revelation. At this standpoint two crucial questions emerge. The first is, 'By what means, and under what conditions, does theology penetrate to this central and assured message

<sup>1</sup> It has been chiefly expounded and utilised in popular theology, but it has also a scientific defence and application in the system of Christian doctrine which was constructed by Wondt as a supplement to his monumental exposition of the *Lehre Jesu*.

of Scripture?' The second is, 'What is the doctrinal content thus discovered which is to be treated as regulative for Christian thinking?'

As to the means of identifying and apprehending the authentic content of revelation, there is somewhat general agreement that it is given in the apostolic principle that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. It is held that a Christian experience is the pre-supposition of the title to handle the subject-matter, as well as of any reasonable prospect of success in handling it; and that the appropriating energy is Christian faith, or reason saturated by the Christian spirit. This conception is elaborately expounded by Dorner in the fundamental part of his doctrinal system.<sup>1</sup> He projects a special science of faith, of which the leading idea is that there are inadequate types of faith resting either on external authority or on rational grounds, and that these give place in a sound development to a faith resting on a personal experience of salvation. His view, summarily stated, is that it is necessary first to traverse the stages which culminate in the experience of redemption through Christ, of peace with God, and generally of the satisfaction of religious and ethical needs; and that the saving faith which claims these blessings involves an assured insight which is the starting-point of scientific religious knowledge. 'The content which faith appropriates from Scripture,' he adds, 'is the immediate object of dogmatic theology.'<sup>2</sup> The Ritschlian school similarly magnifies the indispensableness, competency and responsibility of a personal faith in sifting and interpreting the data of revelation which are attested in Scripture. 'Scripture,'

<sup>1</sup> *Christliche Glaubenslehre*, E. Tr. *System of Christian Doctrine*, 4 vols., 1883.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. p. 145 ff.

says Kaftan, 'is the exclusive and proper source of knowledge which is drawn on in Christian dogmatics, since it is the unique and authentic original monument of the historical revelation of God from whose appropriation by faith Christian knowledge arises.'<sup>1</sup> The same idea is expressed in the reiterated declaration that revelation and faith are co-relative terms. 'Revelation addresses itself to faith,' he says again, 'and it is only through faith, which involves a transformation of the personal life, that it leads to a knowledge of the truth therein communicated.'<sup>2</sup> In such statements we have doubtless a correct description of the actual method by which the substance of the various systems of theology has been won from the Scriptural records of revelation. Nor can it be said that the older theology was altogether blind to the fact that what it made of Scripture was due in large measure to the insight and the tact which accompany a saving faith. The general fact on which the Ritschlian affirmations are based is the same which Calvin observed when he spoke of the authentication of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit testifying from within the spiritual mind. This observation had been too deeply impressed on Protestant theology to be permanently lost sight of; and it was renewed whenever a deepening of the spiritual life brought new inspiration and power into theology. It should also be added that when stress is laid on faith as the instrument for the apprehension of divine truth, there is an easy transition to the type of theology which leans on ecclesiastical definitions. For it is a not unnatural view that, if we have to trust to faith for the interpretation of the data of revelation, it is wise to distrust the verdict of an individual or sectional faith, and to

<sup>1</sup> *Dogmatik*, 1897, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

fall back upon the faith of the collective Christian mind which has expressed itself in widely accepted ecclesiastical symbols. The method may also become somewhat rigidly biblical, as it is arguable that the faith of the theologians cannot compare in spiritual insight and tact with that of the men of the first age to whom we owe the Scriptures of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, is the content of the Scriptures which is appropriated by faith, and which is normative for dogmatic theology? 'The Gospel,' says Lobstein, 'the Word of God, Revelation: these sublime and sacred words which in our schools are necessarily framed into formulas and dogmas, but whose inexhaustible wealth and divine content we must ever grasp anew, this spiritual reality which we only understand in the measure in which we surrender ourselves to its dominion—this is the religious authority in the evangelical and Protestant sense. This authority has a name in history—Jesus Christ.'<sup>2</sup> This general statement commands wide assent; but the definition of the authority as the Gospel is consistent with wide divergence of opinion as to its material content. For Dorner the essential element is the Christian idea of God, which is found to involve the substance of the Catholic determinations of the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, and which leads to the progressive appropriation of a large complex of dogmatic knowledge.<sup>3</sup> In Lobstein's view, which reflects the

<sup>1</sup> A recent book persuasively develops the idea that if we begin with reverence for our own religious intuitions, we cannot withhold reverence from those of the Christian society, and still less from the intuitions of the spiritual aristocracy of the prophets and apostles.—Leckie, *Authority in Religion*, 1909, ch. vi. ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Einleitung in die evangelische Dogmatik*, 1896, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, i. p. 157 ff.

dominant conception of the Ritschlian school, the Gospel consists essentially in the fact that God gives to believing men an experience of salvation.<sup>1</sup> There is a larger element of doctrine involved in the definition in which Ritschl himself sums up the essence of the Christian religion. It will therefore be a considerable part of our task to examine the adequacy of these modern conceptions of the doctrinal basis and implications of the Gospel which have the note of authority.

It should also be pointed out that the mind of the Reformed churches had long realised the reality of this issue, and had made some contribution towards its settlement. There is a voluminous literature of the Reformed church, extending through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to recent times, in which an attempt was made to formulate the fundamental as distinguished from the non-fundamental doctrines of Christianity; and this gives clear indication that a pressing need was felt for attaining a better perspective of doctrine, and for gaining a central position from which the whole region could be controlled. The work of Francis Turretin in this field,<sup>2</sup> and the similar work of the Anglican divines of the eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> were the preliminary attempts on a problem which the churches of the Reformed group are now called on to re-examine in the light of a better knowledge of the chief end of Scripture, and of the genius of Christianity as that has

<sup>1</sup> 'As Word of God the Gospel is not an abstract doctrine, which is calculated to increase the sum of our intellectual knowledge, but a creative act which can liberate and renew our souls. The true revelation is a resurrection from the dead, a new birth, a second creation within the human race.' Kaffan defines it as essentially self-communication of God, which, however, lays the foundation of actual religious knowledge.—*Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutio Theologiae Elencicae*, 1688, i. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Waterland, Works, 1823, vol. viii., *A Discourse of Fundamentals*, with bibliographical note.

been elucidated by a fuller acquaintance with the religions of the world, and with its own doctrinal development.

From the foregoing survey it is seen that the topic of the Rule of Faith includes two branches of inquiry. It includes the question, agitated through ages of controversy, as to the repository to which the data of the Christian revelation have been entrusted, and in which they have been brought within the reach of mankind. To this phase of the subject the first division of these lectures is devoted. It has, however, been indicated, and it will appear more fully in the sequel, that the question as to the seat of Christian doctrine cannot be separated from the question as to the substance of Christian doctrine, that the latter was the deeper and dominating issue which gave point and vitality to the earlier controversies, and that the real goal of the theological quest is a material norm consisting of the central and guaranteed body of Christian truth. In the second division an attempt will accordingly be made to determine the essential intellectual content of the Christian religion, as attested in its original and authentic record, and as observable in its performance of its appointed work in the world; and the criterion thus gained will be employed in valuation and criticism of the principal forms, ecclesiastical or scholastic, which Christianity has assumed in the course of its theological development.

For the following contribution no claim of novelty is made save such as may be made by every writer who gathers ideas from many quarters and expresses them in his own way. The governing idea is that we have to approach theology with an intense realisation that our

primary datum is a religion, which as such undertakes to produce practical results, and that our primary certitude is that the Christian religion is an effective instrument for grappling with the heavy spiritual tasks which it undertakes to accomplish. Christianity is most fitly compared to the medical art, which addresses itself to the remedy of evils and the insurance of well-being in an analogous sphere. The parallel also makes it clear that as a religion Christianity involves a theology. While medicine is essentially practical in its purpose, it can only fulfil its preserving and healing mission on a basis of knowledge—to some extent also on the condition of imparting knowledge to the patients under treatment. Similarly it is indispensable that an effective religion should be founded on the facts of the Divine Being, of the universe, and of human nature; and also that, to a greater extent even than in the parallel case, those who are subjected to its protecting and curative influences should be taken into confidence. The Christian religion necessarily involves a body of truths, either as the presupposition or as the means of doing its work, and these are properly regarded as an integral part of the revelation. On the other hand, the essentially practical purpose of religion creates a presumption that the intellectual element in revelation was restrained by a principle of parsimony, and that it does not extend beyond the region in which it was required as the means of making the provisions of the Christian religion operative and effective. Our conception of the authentic content of revealed truth would thus be that it is the knowledge of God and man, and of the acts of God, which was needed to ensure the efficacy of the Christian religion. On the other hand, for all religious doctrine which merely serves a speculative interest no higher claim

will be made than that at the most it represents sound reasoning upon data of revelation, or probable opinion upon various problems that start up on the circumference of the religious sphere. In other words, the intellectual content of the revelation attested in Scripture consists in such knowledge as 'maketh wise unto salvation'; and no provision can be depended on for the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity in regard to problems of which, without detriment to our religious standing and our spiritual life, we can afford to be ignorant.

A.—THE SEAT OF DOCTRINE