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Church history as a science
and as a theological

CHURCH HISTORY

AS A SCIENCE AND AS A
THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY THE
REV. FREDERICK WILLIAM LOETSCHER, PH.D., D.D.

ON THE
OCCASION OF HIS INDUCTION INTO
THE
ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER PROFESSORSHIP
OF
CHURCH HISTORY

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OCTOBER 13th, 1914

REPRINTED FROM
THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW
JANUARY 1915

CHURCH HISTORY AS A SCIENCE AND AS A THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Board of Directors:

It is with mingled feelings that I rise to address you on this occasion. So strong, indeed, are some of the emotions which the solemn business of this hour reawakens within me, that it would be a sheer affectation on my part not to allude to them.

At your earnest solicitation I have exchanged the chair of Homiletics for that of Church History. In this connection I can only say—but thus much I must say—that as I was unable to make, so I have remained unable to review this decision, without many a secret pang alike of regret and of anxious solicitude. I should be untrue to myself, as I certainly should appear wanting in my obligations to your honorable body, if I should fail to take this opportunity of giving you the renewed assurance of my sincere and grateful appreciation of the privilege of working for three years in the Practical Department of the Seminary,—a service which many cherished testimonies have emboldened me to believe has probably been as useful as any of equal length that I may ever render, and which memory persuades me has been as happy as any that I have ever been permitted to undertake.

But on the other hand, as I face the new duties to which you have called me and to-day formally introduced me, I find much comfort and inspiration in the conviction that in your action I have heard the voice of the Lord, too clear to be misunderstood and too imperative to be disobeyed. And other satisfactions have abounded. The work itself, as I have renewed my acquaint-

ance with it these past months, has more and more resumed those charming features and that benign expression which years ago, as an Instructor in this department, I had learned to recognize as belonging peculiarly to the muse of sacred history. Nor can I conceal my joy in the reflection that you have asked me to succeed one for whom as teacher my reverence, as superior colleague my esteem, and as companion and friend my affectionate regard have been equalled only by my admiration for the exceptional abilities, the signal devotion, and the distinguished success with which for twenty years he has adorned the chair of Church History in this Seminary, the Reverend John DeWitt, D.D., LL.D.

But deeply and gratefully sensible as I am of the high honor your call has conferred upon me, I am at the same time conscious, most of all, of my inadequacy to the task I have assumed and of my unworthiness to follow in the steps of my illustrious predecessors during the century of the Seminary's history. I can only give you my pledge that, as divine grace may enable me, I shall be faithful to the sacred trust committed to my care.

In choosing the theme of the present address, I was led to think that I might perhaps best meet the proprieties of the occasion, if I should strive to realize that double purpose which the late Dr. Shedd declared is the true aim of an inaugural discourse: "to justify the existence of a specific professorship, and to magnify the specific discipline which it imparts".¹ I venture, then, to announce as my subject: "Church History as a Science and as a Theological Discipline."

I. CHURCH HISTORY AS A SCIENCE

When we try to analyze and define the idea of Church History, the most obvious fact confronting us is that our science is a binomial; it has to do with the Church, and

¹ Shedd, *The Nature, and Influence, of the Historic Spirit (Theological Essays, 1877, p. 53)*.

it has to do with history. The importance of this consideration appears the moment we undertake, in the way of a scientific methodology, to determine the relation of these two elements to one another in the organism of that body of knowledge to which they conjointly give the distinctive designation. The difficulty involved in this attempt is, of course, only increased by the fact that both terms belong to the most comprehensive words of human speech. There can be no doubt that the unphilosophic treatment to which our science has so often been subjected has been due chiefly to the unjust, because one-sided, emphasis given now to the one and now to the other of the two objective principles represented in the compound name "Church History". Taking this tendency in its extreme forms, there are those who have unduly depressed, not to say ignored, the idea of history, either by reducing the noun to an adjective, or, worse still, by substituting a quite heterogeneous concept. To such our science becomes merely "Historical Theology" or "Ecclesiastical Theology." Doubtless, in the light of sound principles of theological encyclopedia, these characterizations, narrowly looked at, are not as faulty as at first sight they may appear. For the term "theology," as distinguished from "dogmatics," is quite broad enough to embrace everything that may legitimately be taught in a theological seminary, from that department that seeks to make the latest Assyriological researches throw a new radiance upon the page of sacred Scripture, to that which gives the student the best counsels as to how to order his remarks at a funeral or hold a baby at a baptismal font. The fact remains, however, that the words "church" and "ecclesiastical" are not quite synonymous, but come from different roots and have different associations; and further that "history" is something other than, if not greater than, "theology". At least equally mischievous, on the other hand, is the slighting of the idea of the "Church", and the consequent identification of our discipline with general

or universal history. The two sciences, to be sure, are sisters; indeed, they are twin-sisters. But much as they resemble each other in their physical features and their physiological functions, they are quite unlike in what we may call the development of their moral or spiritual character. If they were precisely the same in all respects, we should, to go no further just now, have no adequate explanation of the well known fact that from time immemorial history has belonged, not to one, but to two faculties of instruction, to two circles of science, the theological and the philosophical. The reason for this, we may be sure, can be found only in some necessity lying close to the very heart of the organism of the sciences. Things of this sort do not come at haphazard. Nor is it strange, therefore, that in days like these, when systematic theology herself, once the proud queen of the sciences, has lost not only her throne, but, as at least some would have us believe, even her right to a seat among the sciences, many should be saying that the university and the college can and should teach the history of the Church. This is inevitable, for if one member of the *corpus theologiae sacrae* suffers, all the rest must suffer with it. But neither the pain nor the mutilation due to the radical surgery proves that the operation was either skilful or even necessary. It may be a case of vivisection, as useless as it is pitiable, the wanton dismemberment and destruction of a living organism. We must, therefore, give due attention to the Church also, if we would do justice to that complex idea of which it is a part, the idea of Church History. For if the Church be only a common, an ordinary, a natural historical phenomenon, there is no reason why the study of its history should not be confined to the appropriate department of the college or university curriculum. But if the Church has a supernatural life inseparable from that organism of miraculous, redemptive energies and their authoritative interpretations which is given us in holy Scripture, then the history of the Church, whatever its

connections with general history may prove to be, not only may, but by a principial necessity must belong to that circle of the sciences, namely the theological, whose task it is to apprehend and reflect the knowledge imbedded in this special self-revelation of God.

So then, we have to inquire, in turn: What is the idea of history? What is the idea of the Church? And what, by consequence, is the idea of Church History?

Our word *history* comes to us through the Latin from the Greek *ἱστορία*. The primary meaning of this noun, corresponding to that of the verb *ἱστορεῖν*, was *learning by investigation*, a usage that still reflected the derivation of the term from *εἰδέναι* to know. A secondary sense naturally arose—the *knowledge thus acquired*. Later still the word came to denote *a narrative, a setting forth in writing of the results of an investigation*. In all three of these senses, therefore, the stress was laid upon the subjective process involved in the ascertainment, the knowledge, and the exhibition or recital of facts. But in our language, *history*, like its equivalent in other modern tongues, has not only a subjective but also an objective sense; it denotes not only a narrative of events but also the events themselves. In German, indeed, the word *Geschichte* has primarily had the latter signification; it means first of all *das Geschehene*, that which has happened. Moreover, just in proportion to the development of history as a science we invariably find that the objective meaning becomes the more important. The reason is not far to seek. For the very right of a science to exist as a separate branch of knowledge depends not upon the method of investigation or its mode of presenting results, but upon its subject-matter. It must, of course, be conceded that historiography as an art has owed much to those French and English writers who have insisted upon treating history as a species of *belles lettres*. Certainly we are all familiar with historical works that would be more valuable as well as more delightful, if they had greater artistic merits. But could

we not say the same even of many volumes dealing with the exact sciences? Do we not prize these in spite of their jejune formul as, their crude wood-cuts and their poor bindings? The fact is that in every science knowledge is the decisive consideration; and if history is to make good its claim as a science, we dare not confound its objective data with any one's description of them. The picture the historical narrative gives is but the reproduction by the author of an image produced in his mind by the historical realities themselves.

What, then, is the subject-matter of history considered as a science? The answer to that question has varied not a little. In accordance with the unlimited scope of the original sense of the word, history at first included all fields of investigation. It undertook to explore the whole domain of human knowledge, to embrace the total wisdom of mankind. From this point of view whatever was history. History was the ocean which drew to its broad bosom not only the fountains of all our thinking, but also the springs of all our life. In history, thus understood, all the sciences without exception so commingle that their onward progress is but one element in the vast process of the world's development, that being a science to-day which to-morrow will be history.

In the course of time, however, the necessities of the case led to divisions and subdivisions of this domain of science. *Divide et impera* has been the secret of man's conquest of the field of knowledge. The first and most radical distinction was that made between nature and man as objects of investigation. It was found that jointly they represented the phenomenal world in its two chief aspects, but that, though they are not absolutely separable, they nevertheless must be kept apart by the mind that tries to reflect in its consciousness the inherent distinctions observable in the objective data of knowledge. The sphere of nature was seen dominated by a universal law of necessity. The planet kept to its appointed orbit. The

tree was seen budding, blossoming and bearing its fruit year after year by a process that was as uniform as it was involuntary. Even in the brute creation, where life becomes conscious and reveals a measure of intelligence, the bee and the beaver were seen performing their humble tasks in precisely the same fashion as they did hundreds of years ago. It is, therefore, only by courtesy that the word history is now applied to anything pertaining to the sphere of nature as such, that is to the domain governed by the law of necessary or involuntary action.

Now besides nature and man there is only one other object of our possible knowledge, and that is God. Strictly speaking the term history can have no reference to him. For he is lifted above all considerations of time and place. He is without succession or change. He remains eternally the same. Indeed, he can become the object of knowledge, whether scientific or experiential, only as he reveals himself. On *a priori* grounds we might infer that this divine self-disclosure, if made for man's benefit, would come to him, as the alleged record of it in the Bible claims it did, through nature and through human personalities. As such it has, to be sure, its own history, a history that becomes the primary source of theology.

These last considerations, however, only give point to the statement that ordinarily we confine our use of the word history to human events. It has its home in what the Anglo-Saxon called the "world", that is, "the age of man". It deals, in the first instance and immediately, only with our free, self-determined activities, though in a subordinate manner it must constantly take account of our material environment. In its broadest objective sense, therefore, history is the sum of all that *man* has thought and wrought, all that he has dared and suffered and achieved, everything that has befallen him and everything that he has done, from the beginning of his generations until now. It is the total life of the human race, each individual member acting and being acted upon as a rational, voluntary and moral cause of events.

But as in all other sciences, so in history, the subject-matter may be treated with more and ever more of philosophic insight and thoroughness. Facts themselves, indeed, are the mere dross of science; the ideas which interpret them are the precious gold in the ore. It marked an epoch in the development of our science, therefore, when, toward the middle of the eighteenth century, just a few years before Voltaire coined the phrase "the philosophy of history",—a phrase to which his treatise of that name did but scant justice because of its shallow rationalism,—Montesquieu emphasized the truth that the most distinctive trait of every social phenomenon lies in its capacity of continuous evolution or development, and that it can be adequately known only by a study of its consecutive states and of each state in comparison with the co-existing general conditions of society. At about the same time, moreover, Turgot, in a singularly profound and forceful manner, made the idea of progress "the organic principle," as it has been called, of history. Since then, the existence of such a principle in the career of mankind has scarcely been questioned, though views have differed as to its precise nature. The influence of Christianity, as will be seen later, has here been decisive. For the present the statement may suffice that now the most obvious fact in history, as in geography, is that the world is round, that the race is not a mere aggregation of units but an organic unity in which every part is reciprocally means and end; and that the only interpretation which does justice to the phenomena of man-life as known to history is that which presupposes the orderly, causally connected or genetic development of the entire process. It is the organic sequence in the relations of the events that has converted the vastness of this chaos into the vastness of a cosmos. The change wrought in our apprehension of the data of history has been like unto that produced in our knowledge of astronomy, when the planets began to be seen in their organic connections as determined by

the always existing but only then discovered law of gravitation, with the sun instead of the earth as the centre of the system. Henceforth history, like the other worlds open to human investigation, takes its place under the reign of law. The events with which it deals present not only an orderly succession, but an organic evolution, a genetic development in which is unfolded the social, political, industrial, intellectual, moral and spiritual progress of mankind.

Such, then, are the presuppositions of history as a science. It has a definite and distinct body of facts for its subject-matter—the life of humanity in the unity, continuity and multiformity of its genetic development; these facts are capable of a rational interpretation and of a systematic treatment that will give proper generalizations of knowledge; these facts are what they are for scientific purposes because of the organic relations in which they stand to one another.

Such a definition of history as the science of the development of humanity is sufficient for practical needs. Its elasticity is its chief merit. Anything more formal would be less useful. Only let it not be supposed that it is the function of a definition to convey any knowledge of the science itself. Rather is the reverse the case; to understand the definition of a science is not a condition but a consequence of the study of the science. All that the definition can do is to specify the distinctive subject-matter of the science.

This having been done in the case before us, we may briefly show, in passing, how and why history is to be differentiated from certain other sciences with which it is often confounded. Nothing need here be said about chronicles or annals. Their subject-matter is not historic at all in the sense that it presents itself to the observer in relations causally determined by man. This is only another way of saying that this species of narrative is not scientific.

Again, biography is not to be identified with history. In loftiness of moral aim and in thoroughness of investigation the two may have much in common. It may be conceded, too, that there is an oft-neglected truth in that favorite dictum of Carlyle's that the history of mankind is the history of its great men. But on the other hand, it cannot be doubted that the course of history as a whole has been determined much more by general causes, tendencies and movements than by the words or deeds or influences of individuals. In fact, history as the development of human society, will always be something larger than the sum total of all great lives or of all lives whatsoever taken as units; just as a polygon, no matter how many sides it may be given, is always smaller than its circumscribing circle. And not only so, but history as an organic evolution cannot possibly be adequately displayed in the most comprehensive biographical encyclopedia ever published or even conceived. History deals with individuals only as parts of the social organism. Biography deals with the life of the race only as this exists in its distinct and separate units.

The attempt has sometimes been made, notably by classical scholars, to identify philology and history, making it the science of all that has been produced or accomplished by the human spirit and preserved in writing for our information. But though this treatment of the facts may be measurably justified so far as the limited and chiefly literary or at least linguistic sources of our knowledge of the ancient world are concerned, the scheme breaks down the moment we apply it to the immensely vaster and quite heterogeneous sources of mediaeval and especially of modern history. Not only does the historian need other aids besides the philological, but—and this again becomes decisive—the subject-matter of his science is entirely different from that of philology: the latter makes the study of language an end in itself; the former makes it only one of many means to an end—the knowledge of the developing

life of humanity in all its phases, including, of course, that of language and literature. It need only be added that this relation does not deny the mutual helpfulness of both sciences.

The modern science of statistics is often presented as a virtual substitute for history. But at best its tables are only auxiliaries for the use of the historian. They are necessarily static, never dynamic, and frequently too atomistic, too fragmentary or too arbitrary to be of much service. Certainly the most significant facts of history will always have to be read into such mathematical estimates and mechanical summaries.

Of a piece with the last error is the attempt to make history fit the last of the natural sciences. But this does violence to the nature of historical facts; for in this realm, as we have seen, causality is primarily psychical or personal, and only in an incidental way, or at least to a subordinate extent, is it physical or necessary. Historical realities are quite too amorphous to be capable of an adequate treatment by the methods of the exact or even the natural sciences. History must needs acknowledge a heavy debt of gratitude to these sciences, for it was from them that she has learned caution and thoroughness in the use of the inductive method in her own more difficult field. But when in their pride of achievement they strive to reduce her to a species of mechanics, or chemistry, or physiology, or biology, perchance even geography, it is high time to break the yoke of this modern scholasticism.

Prof. Freeman defined history as "the science or knowledge of man in his political character".² But among our more celebrated modern historians few could be found who were less philosophical than he. Social or economic conditions, art, religion, morals, the whole world of ideas had little or no interest for him. His own work, so admirable in many respects, is nevertheless the best refutation of his narrow conception of history. Political events

² *The Methods of Historical Study*, London, 1886, p. 118.

have often enough, to be sure, been the most important element in a historical development, but they are always only one of many such factors. Politics, or the science of the state, is only a branch of history.

Sociology as a science has scarcely as yet become conscious of herself. All attempted definitions show her to be close of kin to history. Both deal with man in his social relations. But while history traces the continuous organic development of the life of man, sociology investigates the general forms and functions of typical social groups or communities, in order by a comparison of the types to learn the conditions of their existence and in the light of such knowledge to consider in turn the peculiarities of each type. Obviously, history and sociology are mutual auxiliaries, but their tasks are quite different.

Much the same is true of the relation of history to anthropology, with the closely allied but often independently treated sciences of ethnography, ethnology and demography. These all investigate and classify facts pertaining to the life of the race, or portions of the race, from the lowest stages of savagery to the highest levels of civilization. Their contributions to history are many and valuable; but history alone can use these resources, as it uses all others, to exhibit the organic development of the life of the race as a whole.

In this account of the process by which, with ever-increasing precision, the subject-matter of history as a science has been determined, we have had occasion to allude to some of the more important steps in the corresponding development of historiography as an art. This movement, if only we could take time to trace it, would throw many an interesting side-light upon the former. For while the two lines have often run parallel to one another for considerable intervals, they have time and again interacted.

Broadly speaking, the writing of history has passed through three stages.

In the infancy of the science, as best exemplified to this day by Herodotus, "the father of history", it was considered sufficient to give a simple, straightforward, graphic account of things that happened. The good story-teller was the good historian. He must know, above all, how to gratify the national or racial pride, the religious or patriotic aspirations, or perchance even the mere curiosity of his readers. His spirit and aim is much like that of the epic poet. There are those, indeed, who would deny such works a place in the historical section of a modern library. The fact remains, however, that such narratives are truly historical in the sense that they treat of the real matter of history, though from the point of view of the more philosophic handling of the science they rank but little above annals or chronicles, there being no sufficient grounding of the events in human causality.

It was Thucydides among the ancient Greeks, and Cornelius Nepos and Tacitus among the ancient Romans, who have left us the chief classic illustrations of the second kind of historical composition, the practically edifying, or, as Polybius called it, "the pragmatic history". Here the attempt is made in more or less thoroughgoing fashion, to find the reason of events, whether in the motives of the actors engaged, or in the influences of quite complex social, generally political, phenomena. At their best, such works, responding to a deep-seated human desire and need, have a permanent value as instruments of instruction for the general reader and as guides for men charged with the direction of affairs. Too often, however, the historical pragmatist makes an undue, not to say a culpably unworthy use of his freedom in attributing motives to those of whom he writes, interprets great issues in the subdued light of backstairs diplomacy, and neglects—as was notably the case with many medieval writers of this school—the general interests of culture and civilization, as well as the influence of the material environment.

The highest stage in historiography has been attained

only in modern times. Only in the eighteenth century did men begin to see history, as a body of organically connected facts in the life of the race, sweep majestically, like some new-found planet, into their field of vision. And though no science can point for its humble beginnings to a remoter antiquity than can history, its relatively late maturity ought not to occasion any surprise. For on the one hand, history belongs to the mixed sciences, which deal primarily with spiritual aspects of the universe, but must constantly investigate these in their relation to their material surroundings. It thus partakes of the difficulties that beset alike the psychical and the physical sciences. Accordingly, its progress has in large measure been directly dependent upon the cultivation not only of those allied disciplines, with which, as we have seen, it has sometimes been confounded, but also of those that are technically called its auxiliary sciences; palaeography, diplomatics, sphragistics, numismatics, genealogy, and above all—those two “eyes of history”—chronology and geography. As Dr. Shedd, in the discourse from which I quoted at the outset, has well said: “And if we consider the mental qualifications required for its production, the department whose nature and claims we are considering, still upholds its superiority, in regard to universality and comprehensiveness. The historic talent is inclusive of all other talents. The depth of the philosopher, the truthfulness and solemnity of the theologian, the dramatic and imaginative power of the poet, are all necessary to the perfect historian, and would be found in him, at their height of excellence, did such a being exist. For it has been truly said, that we shall sooner see a perfect philosophy, or a perfect poem, than a perfect history.” But on the other hand, the ultimate reason for the late ripening of historic science is to be found, not on its subjective, but on its objective side—in the nature of its facts or data. For, assuming that the historic development of man is an organic process, a considerable period of time must elapse before a sufficient

number of typical, or at least significant features can be evolved. For instance, there is the idea of unity as an essential characteristic of every living organism. But how could a medieval writer, on historic grounds, posit the unity of the race, when half of the planet, with more than half of the world's population, was to him *terra incognita*? Or where could he, within the narrow limits of his monastery or bishopric, find a suitable yardstick to measure the progress of a civilization which he could understand, if at all, only in the light of a context that embraced many centuries and diverse nations? But no organic evolution is intelligible, if the marks of its progress are not discerned. But above all, such progress itself depends chiefly upon the free and full development of the individual members of the organism. And where in those feudal days did the masses of the people ever enter into their divine birthright of freedom? History herself teaches us that it is only in the latest, the most fully developed, the most complex civilizations that the common man has attained his highest individuality and the liberty requisite to function at the maximum of his social efficiency. In fine, world-history could not be satisfactorily apprehended as an organism, until its organic nature had sufficient time to disclose itself.

Long before that modern day dawned, however, the idea of the organic development of humanity had received a classic and forever sacred expression, first in the life and then in the literature, of a peculiar people, a race that was historically constituted in the form of a special divine economy. From the very beginning of the Christian era, therefore, when that holy Scripture was given a universal mode, this idea began to exert its characteristic influence upon the thought and the life of the world, though it has had to wait till our own day for its approximately ecumenical realization. That is why even that medieval historian who was necessarily limited in the understanding of many of his facts, could nevertheless, by his customary

grouping of all events after Christ under the one rubric of "the last age", give the humble story of his monastery the splendor of a certain ideal unity that we seek in vain in the most finished productions of pagan antiquity. That is why St. Augustine, in his *De Civitate Dei*, our first Christian philosophy of history, could write a prophetic sketch of the progress of the race, at the very time that he saw the pillars of the ancient world crashing to their destruction. That is why all through the middle ages there were some quiet evangelical mystics who could shatter the yoke of hierarchical tyranny and enter into the freedom of full-statured manhood. In a word, if an organism is a unitary structure that secures its own vital growth through the ever-developing perfection of its members, then we must conclude, history herself being the witness, that it is to Christianity, more than to all other influences combined, that the human race owes alike the highest realization of itself as an organism and the most adequate knowledge of itself as such.

This fact obviously calls for further consideration. It must be assessed at its real value. We now turn, therefore, to our second preliminary inquiry: What is the idea of the Church?

Like many another word that once came forth clean-cut and shining from some famous royal mint, the term *Church* has long since, through the attritions of use, become so badly worn down, that few who handle that coin to-day have any clear idea as to what sovereign's image was originally stamped upon it, or how its superscription read, or what value it professed to have. But the knowledge of these details has by no means been altogether lost. It needs only to be more generally distributed for the common good. The most obvious thing, at any rate, that may be said about the Church is that it is a fact given in a definite historical context. It is a phenomenon found only on Jewish and Christian soil. And if the most skilful expert in numismatics cannot tell us all we should like to know

about the process of coining this word, the humblest philologist can tell us its original value. Etymology here, too, is our sufficient guide.

Our word *Church*, like its equivalent in all modern Teutonic languages, and likewise in most of the dialects of those Slavic nations that were converted by Greek missionaries, comes, not from any Germanic source, but directly from the biblical Greek, *κυριακός*, "pertaining to the Lord", that is the Lord recognized as such by the Christians. Originally, no doubt, it was the feminine form of the adjective that was used, the noun to be supplied being *οἰκία*; so that the Church in the first instance was the house of the Lord. Gradually, however, the name was transferred to those who met in this house for worship. The Church became the congregation. In modern Romance languages, however, as also in our own, we find another set of derivatives from another Greek original, *ἐκκλησία*. This is a word which the New Testament greatly ennobled, so that instead of denoting merely the gathering of an assembly, or its place of meeting, it came to mean a company of Christians, that is, persons who believed themselves called by God out of the world of sin unto eternal life through Jesus Christ. Doubtless, our own "ecclesiastic" and "ecclesiasticism," and the like, have been degraded from this lofty plane far below any level of poverty and shame to which even our word "Church" has sometimes been reduced. But taking them in their original strength and beauty, the two expressions emphasize the double truth that is fundamental in this whole discussion: "Church" points to a *κύριος*, the Lord, the head of the body; and "ecclesiastic" points to an *ἐκκλησία*, the members of the body. It is perhaps not altogether without significance, in the light of the religious differences between northern and southern Europe since the Reformation, that the Teutonic nations adopted for their vernacular the word that magnifies the invisible divine head of the Church, while the Romance nations gave the preference to that which directs attention

to the visible human members. But that is by the way. The cardinal fact is that from its earliest history the Church appears as an organism, a body with a head and members, sharing, according to their belief, a common life.

It will have been noticed that in what has just been said, we have had occasion more than once to refer to the faith of the Christian considered as a Church member. Such references have been unavoidable, and the fact of their necessity is too significant to be overlooked. For in the last analysis the Church, as an historical phenomenon, indeed even when viewed as a mere institute exerting a peculiar influence upon the world, must be allowed to possess some sort of transcendent life; in a word, it must somehow be causally related to that special revelation which is the very principle of all theological science. In its inmost essence the idea of the Church is a theological idea.

This by no means denies to philosophy the right she claims of using her own organon for the investigation and interpretation of the facts in regard to the rise and development of the Christian Church. It may freely be granted that many a philosophy of history has been composed upon un-Christian and even anti-Christian principles, which nevertheless has done relative justice to some aspects of the truth so far as the Church is concerned. And certainly whoever has given himself the pleasure and profit of reading the eloquent Phi Beta Kappa Address of the late Prof. Henry Boynton Smith, on "The Problem of the Philosophy of History", will be prepared to admit that such a treatment of the facts will always lead at least some minds to accept as deliverances of philosophy—as conclusions of the unaided reason of man—precisely what the Christian, with the open Bible before him, takes as the presuppositions for all his knowledge alike of the life of the Church and of that new science of theology which that life, as by an inner necessity, was bound to produce. The fact remains, however, that philosophy is prevailinglly too

anthropocentric to be sufficiently sympathetic toward the higher problems involved in the religious life of the race; that her conclusions, resting in this case chiefly upon historical data, can never yield more than a certain degree of probability, a defect that needs must grieve the pious heart that craves certitude as to the alleged presence of the Supernatural in human affairs; above all, that her instrument of investigation, man's reason or understanding, is utterly unable, according to the overwhelming if not unanimous testimony of the visible Church herself, to interpret the deeper spiritual realities involved in this historic evolution.

But what philosophy cannot do in that it is weak through the flesh, theology, as the science of the revealed knowledge of God, can and does accomplish, thanks to the regenerating and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, the true *doctor ecclesiae*. We here come to first principles, which to-day, as much as ever, are and must be accepted by some and rejected by others. This lies in the nature of the central fact in the moral experience of the race—the universal presence of sin and the still limited scope of the palingenesis by which alone the noetic effects of sin can be removed. There is here no room for argument except as between those who start from the same premises. Like every other scientist, the theologian must begin with faith; he must have his presuppositions. These he will not try to prove. For as Dr. Kuyper, arguing this very point, pertinently concludes: "Assurance of faith and demonstration are two entirely heterogeneous things. And he who, in whatever department, still seeks to demonstrate his *principium*, simply shows that he does not know what is to be understood by a *principium*."³ Such, too, was the view of our fathers of the Reformed faith. As our own Westminster Confession puts the matter—speaking of holy Scripture: "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the

³ Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, E. T., 1898, p. 563.

inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts."

Historically, therefore, the decisive fact is that of the divine word itself. Either it is seen shining in its own light or it is not seen at all. This does not imply that if a man is unregenerate and lacks this testimony of the Spirit, he can in no sense contribute to our knowledge of the Church or do other work in the field of theological science; but it is quite clear that his interpretation of the data in their deeper, that is their organic relations, will differ greatly from that of the man who finds in the self-authenticating word of God the seminal principles of the entire development of the Church. In a word, the supernatural revelation, containing as it does among other things, our only information about the origin of the Christian Church, can be made the object of an adequate scientific treatment by the regenerate only. For "except one be born anew"—thus the faith of the Church keeps re-echoing the assurance of her Founder—he not only "cannot enter into" but he even "cannot see"—much less describe—"the kingdom of God."

According, therefore, to the ecumenical Christian consciousness, which alone can be the subject of the science that is competent to deal with the facts here in question, the Church is essentially a supernatural organism implanted within, or grafted upon, the natural life of the race. It is the appropriate self-expression of a new principle of being, a divine germ, lodged in our humanity, namely the special, recreating, enlightening, sustaining, sanctifying, life-transforming grace of God, which makes its partakers "grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love". Not as a mere institute dispensing material or even spiritual benefits, but as a life-system perpetually

nourished from its own root; not as a human society but as a divine communion; not as a natural organization but as a supernatural organism, is the Church the house of the living God. Her origin, her nature, her task, her destiny—in short, her history—is intelligible only in the light of her relation to Christ, her head; that incarnate Word that appeared in our humanity as a second, but also as the last Adam.

Not without significance, for instance, is the statement that God sent his Son “when the fulness of the time came”. For in order that the holy Catholic Church, as distinguished from the national economy of the Old Covenant, might appear, two things were necessary: the incarnate and the written Word. That is to say, Christ had to introduce the divine being itself into our race and once for all bring the age-long redemptive work of God to its organic culmination and relative completion, so that the formula, “It is finished”, might always legitimately be applied to it; but further, to secure for the benefit of a permanent and universal Church the knowledge of these redemptive deeds and their significance, an authoritative and trustworthy record was necessary, precisely of the kind given by inspiration of God in the holy Scripture. With redemption and special revelation completed, and with a fixed canon of sacred writings in which the revealed knowledge of God could be organically applied to the whole race in the most permanent, the most universal, the most constant and the purest form possible to man, the Church could confidently enter upon her ecumenical mission.

Again, it is at once obvious that in tracing the history of the Church, we are never at liberty to identify the spiritual principle inherent in Christianity as a comprehensive life-system with any of its partial and imperfect embodiments in concrete institutions. For practical purposes, to be sure, the whole may most conveniently be studied in its parts. But in every true organism, the whole is always something other than, and greater than, the sum

of its parts. We need ever to reckon with the possibility, therefore, that some who are connected with the visible Church are not in vital union with Christ, and contrariwise that some who do not own any branch of the visible Church as their mother nevertheless share the life of God as their Father. Only those called of God and regenerated by his Spirit, whether with or without means, make up the true *ecclesia* that reflects a genuinely supernatural life in its several marks of unity, holiness, universality and permanence. On the other hand, the Church, too, like the individual Christian, bears her treasures of truth and grace in earthen vessels. Her spiritual life is indeed divine, like that of her exalted head from whom it flows into all her members, but, like his, it is a theanthropic life, however much, unlike his, it has ever been and continues to be marred by sin. For regeneration does not destroy the substance of the natural life; it only quickens and energizes it and brings it into new relations, forms and functions, and invests it with higher capacities. Thus at one time the good and at another the evil elements in the complex development of the Church's life must be emphasized, the former being due to the relatively more perfect realization of her divine life, and the latter to the temporary superiority of her incompletely sanctified human life. The wheat and the tares grow side by side in the same field.

The task of the Church, in the light of what has just been said, can be none other than the progressive realization of the true idea of Christianity. The germ of the divine life must be given the most favorable conditions possible in which to grow, blossom and bear its fruit,—a fruit that will yield in turn seed after its own kind. The gospel leaven must be made to permeate human life in all its phases, activities, conditions and circumstances, in every range and region of individual experience and throughout the most complex social institutes. The revealed knowledge of God is to be spread over the earth and applied, not indeed individualistically to every member of the species, but

organically to the race as a whole. The regenerate who have drunk of the water of life must in turn become fountains of living water to other thirsty souls. The Church is, in a word, to make disciples of all the nations, her chief instrument of instruction being that divinely authoritative written word which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, its primary author, makes possible a permanent and universal knowledge of him, the incarnate Word, whom to know is eternal life. The Church as the body of Christ is to promote his dominion over the race, that race which was originally his by the right of creation and was made his anew by the right of redemption, until at the consummation of the age, having received the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession, he will deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.

We have now analyzed, and with sufficient precision defined the idea of history and the idea of the Church. We need only combine the results in order to formulate the idea of Church History. Disregarding for the moment the question of separating the biblical from the post-biblical kingdom of God, we may say that in its widest scope the subject-matter of our science, its determining principle, is the organic evolution of regenerated humanity; or, the genetic development of the supernatural life of the race.

In this statement, then, the Church is conceived as a single, continuous historical economy; existing, indeed, in successive forms and stages—the Adamic, the Patriarchal, the Jewish-National, the Apostolic, and the present Christian Church, but with all its diversity having the unity of a true organism. There will always, therefore, be a measure of logical propriety in the arrangement that obtains in many theological seminaries by which biblical and ecclesiastical history are grouped together as one course or at least under one department of instruction. For in its essence the Church has ever been the same. It never

has been anything but Christian in principle. From of old the name of the Christ has been the only one under heaven given among men for their salvation. It is important, however, to do full justice to the principles of theological encyclopedia here involved.. For not only will there have to be a special group of studies dealing with the Scripture itself as the principle of all theological science, but in the organic development of the Church herself there is, as we have seen, a difference of fundamental and perpetual significance between the biblical and the post-biblical periods. Throughout the former her life was always supernatural in a double sense, or, better, in a twofold manner; from the first special revelation to the close of the apostolic period, when the organism of special revelation was completed, there was a series of miraculous interpositions of divine power in the course of human affairs; and then, besides, there was the work of supernatural regeneration and illumination in the sphere of the Church's subjective life. But after the work of redemption was brought to its culmination and relative completion by Christ, and likewise the process of special revelation by him and his apostles, then the life of the Church became, as it has ever since remained, supernatural in only the latter of the two modes we have specified. The physical miracle falls away. It is no longer needed. The rebirth and the enlightening of the Holy Spirit are sufficient. As for the rest, whether Pentecost or the close of the first century is to be made the *terminus a quo* for the course in Church History is a mere matter of detail to be determined by considerations of expediency.

From this chronological starting-point, then, Church History will trace the development of the kingdom of God through the ever-lengthening Christian era to the appointed consummation of the present age. And since temporal succession is the necessary form of all becoming, much attention must be given in all historical studies to the turning points, the epochal stages in the organic evolution.

For only when historic movements are properly bounded in time as well as in space can they be visualized with sufficient distinctness to make possible a life-like reproduction of them in a narrative. On the other hand—and this is the only other remark we shall make on this phase of the subject—no chronological divisions, much less subdivisions, can have a permanently fixed value. For time is always changing the perspective through the addition of new fields of investigation, and historical science can only do justice to the given state of knowledge. Who, for instance, would have supposed six months ago, that the year 1914 would witness events that will in all likelihood necessitate a new major division in world-history since the Reformation of the sixteenth century?

Equally important in practice, though likewise incapable of securing for themselves an absolute value, are the material or topical divisions of Church History. They are necessary for the thorough mastery of the subject-matter as a whole. But just because the historic process is a living unity, it should never be artificially dismembered. Nor ought all the periods to be treated exactly alike, as was unfortunately too often the case with some of those older manuals, that made their readers regard history as a sort of anatomical museum stocked with cabinets of a uniform size and appearance, each shelf accommodating the regulation number of skeletons, the bones being always about as dry as they were numerous. Doubtless there will be some advantage in following in the main the familiar lines of cleavage by which one set of facts is grouped for special consideration as the history of missions, the spread of Christianity amid the favoring influences or the more or less determined hostility of the world; another, as the history of the development of the polity, the government and the discipline of the Church; another, as the history of ecclesiastical worship, with the too often neglected story of Christian art and architecture; and still another, as the history of doctrine and dogma, with special reference to the work

of the constructive theologians, the confessional formulas, and the contemporary philosophies of the various periods. But the final, because the only adequate category for every historical development is that of the human personality taken as a whole. Every man's life is something more than the sum total of his thoughts, words, and deeds. It cannot be known apart from these manifestations of itself, but their highest scientific value to the historian is that of enlarging his capacity to know that life itself in its inmost nature, in its unuttered residuum, in its hidden potentialities as well as in its partial expressions. And *a fortiori* the life of the Church, the history of the kingdom of God, must be studied now from one and now from another of literally countless points of view; now in its quiescent states and now in its varied movements; now in its religious, its devotional, its God-ward aspects, now in its introspective moods, and again in its energizing influence upon every condition, circumstance, relation and activity alike of individuals, families, tribes, nations, states, races, and all social groups whatsoever,—so far as these effects and interactions may be seen to have a bearing upon the organic development of the regenerated life of humanity.

In the light of the foregoing principles, we may now more accurately set forth the relation between ecclesiastical and general history. The former is, in the first instance, a species of the latter. Generically, there is and can be but one science of history. For the human race is a single organism, and in their essence the facts of man-life in this world are all of a piece. For holiness, communion with God, is the original as well as the ultimate history of humanity. When the race fell, it fell as a whole; when it will have been redeemed, it will have been redeemed as a whole: not in the sense that every twig and leaf will have been saved, but in the sense that the life of the tree as such will have been saved. The parts cast off perish as *disjecta membra*; the parts preserved unto life eternal are kept in

organic union with the ever-living root. But because regeneration is only the beginning of a many-sided process that requires nothing short of a life-time to bring its fruits unto perfection, the spiritual man will necessarily retain to the very end of his days many of the relations, forms, and activities—in a word, the sinful elements—of the natural life. And the same is true of the evolution of the race as a whole. Accordingly, history in the subjective sense must reflect this state of affairs, and hence, as regards the entire problem of the methodology of history, there can be only one heuristic, or the science that deals with the nature of the sources of history, including the auxiliaries we have already named,—philology, palaeography, diplomacy, geography, chronology, etc.; only one theory of historical criticism, or the science that determines the value of these sources; only one hermeneutics, or the science that unfolds the valid principles of interpretation; and likewise only one art of historical composition, the synthetic presentation in the form of a written narrative of the results secured by the three processes just named. Moreover, because religion, whether as the love of the Father, or as the love of the world, is ever the deepest concern and the regnant power in every life, even general history is absolutely unintelligible apart from the religious experiences of the race. In the nature of the case, therefore, ecclesiastical and general history will often deal with the very same facts.

But this is not the whole truth concerning the relation of these two branches of knowledge to each other. For on the one hand, so far as even their present development is concerned, they view the same data from different standpoints. General history regards the historic process as the evolution of humanity; ecclesiastical history regards it as the evolution of regenerated humanity. The former contemplates the human agents as men; the latter, as Christian men. The former deals with society as a natural organism; the latter, as a spiritual organism. The

former sees God in human affairs in his providential activity only, if at all; the latter beholds him also in his work of grace for, and in, and through sinners. This of itself leads to a characteristic difference in the valuation of the self-same elements in the historic development. On the other hand, the relation of the two processes of evolution to each other is constantly changing, and this necessitates a continuous readjustment of the boundary lines between ecclesiastical and general history. For the Church, the kingdom of God, Christianity, is conquering the world. The leaven is leavening the whole lump. Rapid as may be the expansion of the natural life of the race in some periods, yet on the whole the development of its spiritual life takes place at a still more rapid and an ever accelerating rate of progress. In nature it is never possible, but in the realm of grace it has often occurred, that a nation is born in a day. And quite apart from the extraordinary Pentecostal seasons of spiritual awakening, we need to remember that redemption is destined to be a cosmic process, transcending the boundaries of the human race itself, so that the history of the Church must one day be the truly universal history. We ought not, therefore, to conceive of the natural and the supernatural development of humanity as two endless parallel lines; nor even as the two foci of an ellipse, from which, so to say, two independent and mutually exclusive evolutionary processes are trying to occupy contiguous or perchance the same territory lying in the one given plane; but rather as two spheres of organic life: one, the Church, the spiritual order, being enclosed within the other, the world-order; each proceeding from the same original centre in the natural and spiritual life of the first head of the race; each expanding and striving, against the opposition of the other, to fill the whole realm of possible human interests; but the final result of the conflict being that "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." More and more, therefore, the very

ground for the distinction between sacred and secular history is destined to vanish. Meanwhile, let it not be forgotten that the only reason that we may regard the entire historic process as a holy one is that the thrice holy God has, in his infinite mercy, made it possible for the race as such to be a partaker of his own holiness by means of the double gift of his grace—a special revelation of redemption, preserved in the holy Scripture, and the regenerating, enlightening and sanctifying Holy Spirit, by whose power, in this present dispensation, the holy Catholic Church is summing up all things in its head, the Lord Jesus Christ. In him, and in him alone, all contradictions are reconciled. In the light of his cross, and there alone, do we find the true principle of an adequate philosophy of history. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, alike of all creation, of all revelation, and of all redemption. "All things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things; and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preëminence. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens."

Such, then, as we conceive it, is the idea of Church History as a science. The Church being the congregation of saints, the communion of the faithful, the body of Christ, the history of the Church here on earth is the organic evolution in this present world of the spiritual, the supernatural, or the redeemed life of humanity. It is a process, therefore, whose deepest significance is intelligible only in the light of Christian theology—that knowledge of God which has become possible for us through special revelation. It is not enough for the Church historian to

be a theist; for as even the rationalistically inclined Gieseler had to acknowledge: "he cannot penetrate into the internal character of the phenomena of Church history without a Christian religious spirit."⁴ In other words, if theology is the science whose special task it is to reflect in our consciousness the revealed knowledge of God, then Church History must needs be a branch of theological science; for outside of the Church, as the society of the regenerate, there is and can be no true theology. In fact, our science is determined in the last analysis by those same three theological factors that determine the entire circle of the theological sciences: the word of God which was in due time recorded in the Scriptures; the Holy Spirit in his regenerating and illuminating work; and the organically connected members of the body of Christ, or the Church. It is not strange, therefore, that Church History has always, as a matter of fact, flourished best in the congenial soil of the theological sciences, and that, among these, it has necessarily held a place of usefulness and honor second to no other.

We turn, therefore, to a brief consideration of the remaining division of our subject.

II. CHURCH HISTORY AS A THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINE

In trying to characterize the specific discipline inculcated by our science as prosecuted in this and similar institutions of sacred learning, we may consider, first, its distinctively scientific value, and then its other—if the term will not be taken in too narrow a sense—more "practical" benefits.

The strictly scientific uses of Church History can perhaps most advantageously be presented by means of a rapid survey of its relations to the other departments of theological instruction.

According to the customary division of theological studies, there are, besides Church History, three main

⁴ Gieseler, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, I § 5.

groups: one dealing with the Scripture as the principle of all theological science, that is, then, the word of God as such; another with dogma, or the content of the word as systematically reflected in the understanding of regenerate humanity; and another with the sacred offices instituted for the maintenance and the propagation of the word. To all these, though to each in a different way, Church History sustains the intimate, vital connections that betoken truly organic relations. Indeed, only in the processes of history can we get a satisfactory view of the way in which every part of the tree of theological science becomes reciprocally a means and an end with respect to every other. But let us particularize.

Logically and chronologically first in the organism of scientific theology is that group of studies which deals with the word of God, more accurately, the Scripture, as such. Of these a considerable number are strictly propædeutic—biblical philology, biblical archæology (including biblical chronology and geography), biblical hermeneutics, and biblical isagogics (including the lower and the higher criticism of the Bible). These need not now detain us. Their importance is due to that to which they lead, and for which they prepare, the student of theology. Inasmuch, however, as they ordinarily flourish only within the realm of ecclesiastical life, Church History, as the narrative of that life, will have occasion to record their progress, call attention to their deficiencies, inspire the necessary efforts for their improvement, and thus render them many incidental benefits. To Church History as a science belongs, in particular, the honor of having inaugurated, as early as the age of the Renaissance, that really critical study of ancient documents which has developed into the exceedingly important science of modern literary criticism. As for biblical canonicity, this is in the main an historical discipline, and its chief materials, so far as the New Testament is concerned, are to be found specifically in the domain of the Church's early history.

But the queen in this sisterhood of biblical studies is that which is often used to give its name to the whole group, exegesis, culminating in biblical theology as the science that exhibits the revelation of God in its organic historical development. In view of what has already been said concerning the "truth and divine authority" of Holy Scripture as the very principle of theological science, it is plain, on the one hand, that Church History will be deeply indebted to these exegetical disciplines. For the great central ideas that organize and animate the biblical consciousness are the very ones that are constantly giving fresh impulses to the development of the spiritual life of the race. In fact, there is no movement of prime significance in this whole sphere that cannot be traced back to some germinant scriptural truth. Moreover, both according to its own claim and according to the witness of history, the Bible is itself the only sufficient test of human life, especially of its moral values, the supreme arbiter of man's character, conduct and destiny. History needs precisely such a criterion, and only the scientific study of the Bible can put this boon into the historian's hands. And above all, biblical theology, just because it sets forth the organic progress of supernatural revelation in the Scripture, presents an invaluable norm for the interpretation of the kindred development that constitutes the subject-matter of Church History—the supernatural life of man begotten of the word and the Spirit of God. For biblical theology, though it deals with an evolution that is somewhat narrowly limited in time, nevertheless, because of the unique and final character of that process, sounds those full and fundamental tones that make up the chord of the dominant in the noblest harmonies that human life has been able to produce ever since it came under the power of the law given by Moses and the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. But on the other hand, Church History, in turn, furnishes indispensable aid to the exegetical theologians. Quite apart from the knowledge which it alone

can supply them concerning the history of interpretations, concerning the historic improvements of their scientific methods and tools, and concerning the special needs of their department in their own day, Church History often furnishes the data that make it safe to reject some interpretations as no longer worth trying, or wise to adopt others as probable. Especially in the exegesis of predictive prophecies has many an overconfident subjectivist been put to grief by the stern, hard facts of history. And in general, as in other fields of scientific investigation, so here, the limitations, errors, and dangers attending the exercise of the unquestioned right of private judgment, can be best overcome, or avoided, by the more thorough cultivation of the historic, that is the universal, as distinguished from the individualistic spirit. But above all, history is itself the best commentary on the Bible. Christianity is what it is in history. In history, the ideas of the word realize themselves, and this multiform, continuous process is ever shedding new light upon the meaning of the spiritual energies and potencies stored up in those Scriptures through which we most fully come to know him "in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden". The circle into which our reasoning here falls is a necessary but not a vicious one. For in history the word of God keeps producing its characteristic effects; and these effects in turn explain their cause. Exegetical and historical theology are mutually helpful.

The scientific value of Church History will appear greater still, when we examine its relation to systematic theology (including the introductory and supplementary sciences of apologetics and biblical ethics).

For, in the first place, systematic theology is absolutely dependent upon Church History. This is not to be taken in any anti-Protestant sense, as if the dogmatician makes the historical apprehension of revelation, and not the revelation itself, the subject-matter of his science. The

fact remains, however, that *suo jure* life is always first, antedating all scientific reflection. And in particular, with respect to our truly scientific knowledge of God, there was, and there could be, no theology, until after the Church had been in existence long enough to discern at least some of the organic relations of revealed truth. For the subject of theological science is not the Christian individual but the Church, the communion of the faithful, the society of the regenerate. And as no science can prosper save as it is cultivated by those who stand in organic relations with its subject-matter and with one another, so the theologian, if his work is to be fruitful, must always connect his personal efforts with the results already achieved by those who, as members of the body of Christ, being regenerated and guided by the Spirit, have helped the Church to apprehend the revealed knowledge of God in its organic, that is, its truly scientific character. Commonly, as we know, the dogmatician occupies a definite confessional standpoint, and this position of itself will ordinarily guarantee his vital contact with legitimate and suitable lines of theological construction. He never presumes, if he is a really qualified worker, to perform his arduous task as a system-builder, by trying to lay anew, through an independent study of Scripture, the very foundations of his structure, but rather, like those skilled architects succeeding one another age after age in the common effort to finish some stately old cathedral, he will strive to complete, perchance to restore or to correct, the work of his predecessors. In short, the history of Christian dogma and doctrine will furnish him with his choicest materials, critically sifted and properly estimated as to their scientific value. With these in his possession, he needs must re-examine all his data in the light of the basal principles of his science, the teachings of holy Scripture. He will thus not repeat the error of Scholasticism, which conceived it as its chief business to defend and confirm its historic confession. Nor will he hesitate, in his own use of the Bible, to trust the guidance

of the Holy Spirit as the true *doctor ecclesiae* for the Church of his own, as of every other age. But he will always find the secret both of his genuine scripturality and of his most fruitful theological productivity by entering, with due reverence and humility, but likewise with genial independence, into the labors of the ecumenical Christian spirit as the best aid to his understanding of the inspired mind.

Again, Church History is a necessary supplement to dogmatic theology. For by its very definition, this latter science seeks to know, not what has been or is now held to be true, but only what is ideally true, concerning God and his relations to the world; not what men have believed, but what they ought to believe. Accordingly, dogmatics is essentially a static presentation of the content of Christianity. It is a group of facts, doctrines, principles, concepts, theories, speculations, all reduced, as the phrase is, to a system. For that very reason, however, it can never embrace and reproduce all our knowledge of God, but only our scientific knowledge of God. But this is, always has been and must ever continue to be, but a small part of the great boon which has come to our race through the revelation recorded in the Bible. The fact is that Christianity itself entered the world not as a dogma, but as a historic process, and that from the very beginning, when as yet there was, and could be no theological science, the Church nevertheless had a knowledge of God that was sufficient for all except her purely scientific needs. Moreover, to this day, theological, like all other science, can be the concern of only a relatively small part of mankind. But this other, this more general but likewise more vital, experiential knowledge of God, can and does flow directly from the Bible to all who enter the kingdom of heaven. No doubt the Spirit of God has special blessings to bestow upon the Church through her scientific expositions of the Scripture, but to the praise of the glory of divine grace be it said, he likewise makes not only the

preaching, but even the reading of the word "an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation". That is to say, even the non-scientific knowledge of God constantly operates to produce the characteristic effects of the divine word. But to trace these in all their organic relations throughout the whole development of the spiritual life of the race is the very task of Church History, a task which dogmatics cannot perform just because it is not an historical but only a normative science. It can, indeed, rationalize the entire historic evolution and abstract therefrom and embody in its system an important series of ideal coefficients. But the real efficiencies of the movement it has no means of presenting. It cannot reproduce in their concrete reality the manifold and multi-form workings of the divine word upon the whole world of human life. The basal importance of all this appears only when we apprehend the deeper significance of the Scripture as the principle of our theological science. Then we can never rest satisfied with the metaphors that make the Bible a mere quarry of limestone or marble, or perchance a mine of gold or precious stones. It is this; but it is much more. It is a dynamic. It is a hammer; it is a sword; it is a fructifying shower; nay, it is a seed; it is living and active; it is spirit and it is life. And, therefore, to obtain the fullest possible knowledge of God, we must study the word not only in its states of equilibrium and quiescence, as reflected in a body of divinity; but also in its movements, its salient energies, its germinant accomplishments, its total impact upon the life of man, as these are reflected in ecclesiastical history, the narrative of the age-long evolution of regenerate humanity under the power of the divine word and Spirit. What the dogmatician calls an idea the historian sees at work as a living force. And how much richer and fuller, for example, does my knowledge concerning the doctrine of justification by faith become, when, with all the aid the

systematic theologian can give me by way of defining this truth in a formula, and relating it to the other truths of his system, I see the principle itself take shape in the heroic soul of a Martin Luther, become the inspiration of a great evangelical Church, and bring a whole continent to a new birth first of spiritual and then of civil and political freedom. Only in its action can the divine idea exhibit to the full its "power of an endless life". The glory of the fountain is the volume and might of the majestic river. Not in the least do we detract from the impressive grandeur and magnificence of any of the famous sanctuaries reared by the architectonic genius of the theological system-builder; but to Church History belongs the honor, the unique distinction, of exhibiting the total knowledge of God in the noblest and most comprehensive synthesis possible—a synthesis quite too vast to be embodied in any set of logical formulas, the synthesis of the life which alone is capacious enough to hold all the elements of the Church of God in its world-embracing historical development. In short, it is only through the Church, in the sum of its varied activities, that what Paul calls the manifold, the much-variegated wisdom of God can be made known alike unto us here on earth and "unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places". Only in a historic narrative, only by means of a dramatic representation, such as the inspired Scripture itself had to make use of, can the knowledge of God in its fulness be reproduced for our contemplation and appropriation. Church History is a necessary supplement to dogmatic theology.

And in the third place, Church History is of inestimable benefit to the systematic theologian because it inculcates in him the right temper for his scientific labors. It delivers him from the temptation which alas! too often has become his besetting sin, the harsh and repellent dogmatism that so readily degenerates into rancor and makes it next to impossible for him to grasp the truth in its ripeness and roundity. No doubt, Church historians as a class have

been quite too often the victims of the opposite vice, the theological indifferentism and latitudinarianism that makes them color-blind with respect to important phases of doctrinal controversies. In this respect, Eusebius, "the father of Church History", has had altogether too many admirers and imitators. Nevertheless, the historic spirit is the general, the universal, the racial spirit, and as such the truly human and humane spirit. We hear little to-day, and we ought to be duly grateful for the fact, of that dreadful malady with which, for instance, many of the great and good men of the Reformation were so grievously afflicted, the *rabies theologorum*, a disease for which no preventive or antidote was found, until the nineteenth century, with its unprecedented interest in historical science, discovered an efficacious one and gave it a fitting name—historical-mindedness. In the clear dry light of history, men began to see that heresy, if a real error, is only an excrescence, having no abiding place in the organism of theological science; that orthodoxy cannot perish from the earth while a single hidden root retains its hold upon the truth as it is in Jesus Christ; and that so far as the human personalities are concerned, no one on either side lives consistently by the logic of his scientific propositions, but is now better, and now worse, than his creed. History gives theological opinion its proper life-context, and thus enables even the polemic writer to differ in generous and genial fashion from his foe, and to realize the noble apostolic precept of "professing the truth in love."

But if Church History confers such great benefits upon the sciences in the exegetical and dogmatic departments, its service in behalf of the so-called practical theological disciplines is still more important. For it is the peculiarity of all these studies that they have a technical purpose in view. Their problem is that of the effective propagation of the word of God for the maintenance and promotion of the life of the Church in all its phases. The scientific principles which underlie the technique all pertain to the

methods by which these several tasks, in the pastoral office, the work of the pulpit, the instruction of the young, the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, are to be accomplished. But he who asks how a thing can best be done will invariably ask how others have tried to do it. History alone can give the complete answer, with the data for an adequate critique of the various solutions of these practical problems. Commonly enough, to be sure, professors in these departments content themselves with recent history; their own experience is likely to be the chief source from which they draw their counsels and precepts. But the accumulated wisdom of the centuries ought not to be ignored. In fine, an historical knowledge of Christianity is an indispensable prerequisite for the most successful cultivation of the practical theological disciplines. It alone can interpret for them the living present to whose needs they are to minister. It alone can help them to a discovery of their special and peculiar tasks. Above all, the comprehensive empiricism of history will give them their most valuable materials—those that will best illustrate the theoretical principles necessary for the practical guidance of the student.

Even if, therefore, we had nothing more to say concerning the disciplinary value of Church History, these varied, strictly scientific benefits would alone warrant Melancthon's judgment: *Praecipue historia opus est in ecclesia*. History, we may say, gives theological science as a whole its best insight into its own nature—its tasks, its methods, its problems, its prospects. Theology has no greater need to-day than just that of applying in all its branches the sharpened instruments and perfected methods of that historical science which, even in speculative Germany, has acquired the ascendancy over all other sciences, and which, throughout at least the western world, has become in things intellectual the proudest boast of this last century. And especially, therefore, in this new country and this youthful nation of ours, where, just because of

our comparative lack of historic sense, we have too often slighted the solid, well-tested historic realities of other lands, and in consequence have had so much to suffer from all sorts of theological Philistinism, morbid religiosity, pseudo-faiths, and ecclesiastical humbuggery, students for the ministry will do well to remember that history is that science whose special business it is to emphasize the organic character of the truly progressive life of humanity, that among the historical sciences Church History must ever be entitled to the highest place, and that as such it can be second to none among the theological sciences.

But the scientific uses of Church History are not the only, or even the most important benefits of this discipline. We need to remember that the primary function of a theological seminary is the making of "good ministers of Christ Jesus", men who will be "furnished completely unto every good work" in the service of the Church. Important as are the claims of theological learning, they ought never to be magnified in such a way as to relegate to a subordinate position the practical aims for which institutions like this were called into being. We shall not retract or qualify a single statement we have made concerning the need for every theological student in these days of a thoroughly scientific training. But we cannot forget that life is many-sided; that it has other and higher concerns than those of the intellect; that truth is in order to holiness, and that knowledge must lead to service. To know is good; to do well is better; but to be what one ought to be—this is the whole of life. Every student for the ministry should strive to make himself as much of an expert in theological science as possible; but he can do this only by becoming something greater and nobler, like that beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus' bosom and most fully caught the mind of the Savior,—a divine in the highest and holiest sense of the word. And certainly no member of a theological faculty, whatever be his attainments in science, will be satisfied with his service as a teacher, unless he enters

into the blessed work of moral creation and becomes a co-laborer with God in the execution of that glorious primeval purpose: "Let us make man."

Only from this point of view can we discern the highest uses of Church History as a theological discipline—what we may call its more practical benefits. With the bare enumeration of these I shall conclude.

First of all, there is the unique cultural value of this study. For one thing, as history in general has ever been the most comprehensive of the sciences, so among the theological branches, Church History traverses a wider field than any other. Its literature is quite as extensive as that of all the other departments combined. Its subject-matter is as varied as human life itself. It is the least special, and, by that very token, the most liberal of the theological studies. It stands nearest of all to the so-called "humanities," those courses in the college and university which the wisdom of a millennium has preserved as those best adapted to the making of a truly educated man. It breathes the atmosphere of that generous culture which is no less useful to the minister than it is to the lawyer, the juriconsult, the man of affairs, the philosopher, the friend of arts and letters. Moreover, just because the historic spirit is the spirit of humanity as a whole, the influence of our discipline is a valuable corrective of those intellectual vices to which the extreme specialization in scientific labor exposes alike the graduate and the undergraduate student of our day,—the exaggeration, the distortion, and the lopsidedness that spring from the failure to "see life steadily and see it whole". But no one can read history even in a cursory fashion without catching something of the meaning of that underlying unity which here, as in the case of every organic evolution, is as obvious as is the diversity. In this respect the study of history affects the mind in much the same way as does travel in a foreign land; the impressionistic vividness of sight, grasping a multitude of details in a single comprehensive view,

not only promptly dispels many false preconceptions and prejudices, but furnishes the due perspective for an accurate understanding and judicial estimate of the whole. Surely in an age like ours, distraught as it is by its specialism and confused by the disintegrations of its knowledge, Church History, as the narrative of the kingdom of God, can render a unique service by restoring to us the clear perception of the true realm of ends in human character and conduct; by coördinating and harmonizing the divergent and often discordant elements of our culture; in a word, by showing us anew the unity of our thought and life, the beauty of the ordered whole of man's endeavors and experiences.

In the second place, Church History has a high moral value. Its facts have an inalienable ethical significance. If the history of the world is the judgment of the world, much more is the history of the Church the judgment of the Church. One cannot trace the career of man, especially of man as a subject of redemption, without acquiring a new sense of the transcendent moral values of life and without constantly exercising the highest function of the human spirit—that of forming and estimating standards of duty, ideals of character, principles of conduct. History becomes a mighty means of grace. Its endlessly varied message takes quick and strong hold upon life, entering not only by the door of the intellect but, like all the deeper and more vital influences, through the countless avenues that lead into the secret places of the subconscious self. I read the pathetic story of the Church's failure to seize some God-given opportunity, I see her momentary defeat, her shame and misery, and I needs must become more vigilant and zealous in my own Christian stewardship. I get a glimpse of something true or good or beautiful in the most unexpected nooks and corners of history—spring-tide flowers at the doorstep of some squalid hovel—and an ampler charity fills my heart. I hear the oft-repeated cry of a noble army of reformers born out of their due time,

“How long, O Lord, how long?” and as I see the slow delivery of the divine answer, “A thousand years are as one day”, the virtue of patience wears a new lustre in my daily routine. I behold empires fall, nations perish, civilizations crumble into nothingness, art and song and the gentler ministries of life being hushed one by one in the silence of the vast desolation, but lo! the Prince of Peace is in the van, leading the age by some strange anabasis into a more spacious and better time; and never again can I be the pessimist I was. After all, Christianity is its own best defence. Its victories are the supreme, the irrefutable analogy of its faith. In a word, if history teaches reverence for the past and moderation and caution with respect to the present, it likewise fires the heart even of the solitary disciple with genial optimism, with indomitable courage, with undying hope, for as nothing else can or does, it reveals God

out of evil, still educing good,
And better, thence again, and better still
In infinite progression.

Sixty-five years ago, on the occasion of his induction into the chair of Church History in this Seminary, Dr. James Waddell Alexander said: “To detect the products of this secret life, which has been visibly the same in every age, to recognize it, to love it, and to emulate it, is the delightful work of Church History. Here are the genuine memorials of the fathers; here are the true relics of the saints; not to be registered in calendars and graven on stone, and worshipped as idols, but to be followed, and by grace surpassed. If experience is valuable in our own hearts, then in the hearts of others; if in what is contemporary, then in what is past; if of one age, then of all ages. . . . Next to the study of God’s work in Scripture, is the study of God’s work in the later Church.”

In the third place, Church History can confer inestimable benefits upon the minister of the Gospel in his official work. This is by way of eminence the practical value of this

study—its strictly professional or vocational uses. We have already seen how the history of the Church illumines and illustrates all the scientific principles, that is, the theories, which must underlie the practical theological disciplines. But the pastor's use of this information is quite different from that of the professor who is called upon to teach these subjects. The former deals with the problem in the concrete. It is not a theory but a condition that confronts him. His work in the parish, as a shepherd of souls, as a preacher, an ecclesiastic, an administrator of affairs, an official leader of the Church, constantly requires him to determine practical issues. Now, of course, if he lacks common sense—the sense to see the common things of life in their true relations—not even the most thorough knowledge of history can give him that nice discrimination as to the best course of action under given circumstances, which is the peculiar grace and genius of the man of tact. But granted even a modicum of this native wit, the knowledge of history will be the best means for its cultivation. "The fearless and reverent questionings of the sages of other times" will be for the minister, as for all others dealing with practical measures, "the permitted necromancy", as it has been called, "of the wise". He, too, will find it true: "There is somebody that knows more than anybody and that is everybody." For a broad, strong, efficient and judicious churchmanship, no study is more helpful than that which enables a man not only to avoid methods and expedients that have time and again proved their worthlessness or insufficiency, but also to commend the promises and prophecies of his own program by some sure word of history.

But above all, the minister of the Gospel can and should exploit Church History for his work as a preacher. By this we mean something more than that he ought to be familiar with typical products of the pulpit in the various stages of its development; though it goes without saying that in mastering any art, nothing whatever can take the

place of the study of its acknowledged masters, alike the dead and the living. But here, too, we are concerned not with theory, but with practice; not with homiletics as a discipline, but with preaching as a pastoral service. And therefore, if we have correctly apprehended Church History as the organic evolution of the regenerate life of humanity, we must insist that the history of Christianity is nothing less than the Gospel itself in the richest, the most complete, the most effective mode in which it can be presented. It gives the truth its most vital expression, resembling in this respect the inspired Scripture itself, which always places the revealed knowledge of God in an impressive life-context. Hence the unique value of that homiletic mode which makes a free use of history. Doubtless, there are special difficulties attending the composition and delivery of historical sermons. They demand ample knowledge, the fruit of wide and varied reading; a nimble, penetrating and cultured historical imagination that can readily seize the suggestive details of an incident, a biography, an epoch, and group them in a life-like and moving picture; and an unusual skill in the disposition of the illustrative material and in its adjustment to the practical, the religious, aim of the message. Ordinarily, too, such discourses, because of their abundant narrative and descriptive elements, will require more time than others for their delivery. But even so, the sermon of history has its own incomparable charm and power; while most of its advantages, without any of its drawbacks, may be secured in that type of preaching which, whatever the subject, makes generous use of history for all four of the rhetorical modes by which a theme may be developed and applied—explanation, argument, illustration and persuasion. Not seldom will well selected historical materials perform all these homiletic functions at one and the same time. Precisely here we find the secret of the acknowledged failure of many so-called doctrinal sermons. Theoretically, this is the highest species of the sermonic

art. It certainly ought to form the staple of pulpit work. But as a matter of fact, preachers themselves being the witnesses and the judges, this type of discourse is often the least satisfactory to themselves and the least interesting and edifying to the hearers. The trouble ordinarily is that the message is kept too far aloof from life—the life out of which the sacred text itself grew, and the life in the pew to which that text is supposed to minister. But a new day dawns over many a pulpit—a day of vastly increased power—when the preacher realizes that every truly vital sermon has not only heaven for its father, but also earth for its mother: that the biblical doctrines are all facts imbedded in a historic development: and that it is his duty not merely to conceive the truth as thought but to perceive it as life; not so much to forge long-linked abstractions, addressed to but one faculty of the mind, and that commonly the least trained and the feeblest, the ratiocinative—but rather to use the broader strokes, the pictorial suggestiveness, the impressionistic concreteness by which history, no less than poetry, succeeds in making a truly universal appeal in behalf, largely, of the very same moral and spiritual realities with which the pulpit must deal. To stir the imagination of the speaker and hearers so that it will quickly seize not only the surface value, but the cubical contents, the hidden power of a fact; to awaken memories in his heart and theirs that will smite conscience as with a sabre-stroke, or fill the soul as with the blessed light of childhood's golden morning; to enable him to emotionalize his ideas, that being self-moved, he may move all who see the glow and feel the throb of his own passion for the truth; to help him clothe the dry bones of his homiletic skeletons with the flesh and blood of life that is all the more real because it is historic, so that his incarnated message, like the gospel itself, nay, like that divine Logos who became man in order to be our gospel, may be an ever-living word, instinct with personal power and magnetism,—these are some of the possible ministries

of history to him whose task it is, by the noble art of true preaching, to promote the noblest art of true living.

And now, finally, as the supreme excellence of our discipline, we mention its religious value. Not for its scientific purposes chiefly, nor yet mainly for its varied cultural, ethical and professional benefits ought we to cultivate the knowledge of the history of the Church. For as in all other theological disciplines, so in this, the highest aim is not to be found in ourselves but only in him who has established and promoted the kingdom of heaven in this world for his own holy name's sake. Doctor Freeman closed his celebrated Inaugural Lecture at Oxford, on "The Office of the Historical Professor", by saying: "We shall surely not be less at home in our own generation, if we bear in mind that we are the heirs and scholars of the generations that went before us, if we now and then stop in our own course to thank the memory of those without whom our own course could not have been run, if we are ready, at every fitting moment, to 'praise famous men and our fathers who begat us' ". It is a worthy sentiment, ever true and timely. But surely we have a higher duty and a more blessed privilege; it is that of rising, as from every contemplation of the work and word of God in Scripture, so from all our study of his deeds of grace and messages of mercy in the later history of the Church, with eyes and hearts uplifted in adoring thanksgiving and praise to him, the eternal and all-glorious King of the ages, the Triune God of our creation and redemption, of whom, through whom, and unto whom are all things. That deep word of truth which Hase made the motto of his Church History must be our guide in the realization of the final end of this discipline: "The Lord of the times is God, the turning-point of the times is Christ, the true Spirit of the times is the Holy Spirit." Thus shall we more fully know him who is best known in the congregation of his saints, and more worthily serve him whom to glorify is man's chief end. In fine, Church History

reveals its crowning excellence only when viewed in its organic relations with that branch of human knowledge concerning which the Angelic Doctor of the schools said: "Theologia a Deo docetur, Deum docet, ad Deum ducit."

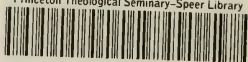
FATHERS AND BRETHREN, I thank you for your kind attention and patient forbearance. I have detained you too long; but I cherish the hope that you will be gracious enough to look upon the undue length of my remarks as but the defect of a real virtue in your new professor of Church History, his sincere conviction concerning the importance of the work to which you have called him and his earnest desire to magnify the service which he feels you may justly expect him to try to render to this institution of sacred learning and to the Church at large. Never has the task seemed greater, or its responsibilities more onerous, than at this moment. But in humble reliance upon the all-sufficient grace of God, I shall continue, as I trust I have begun, to take heed to this ministry which I have received in the Lord, that I may fulfill it. May his strength be perfected in my weakness, to the end that in him no labor of mine may be in vain, and that the service to-day inaugurated may increasingly redound to the praise and glory of his name.

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