









THE SOURCES AND AUTHORITY  
OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY



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*Being an Inaugural Lecture delivered by the*

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## PREFACE

THE following Lecture is published substantially as it was delivered. I have altered or omitted some sentences which seemed to me incorrect, and attempted to remodel some of those most ill-expressed. I have also restored a few passages which were omitted on account of their length.

I should like, however, to take this opportunity of amplifying a few points in the argument. My friend Mr. Boutwood, of the Aristotelian Society, to whose friendly criticisms I have been much indebted, writes with reference to the use that I have made on p. 16 and elsewhere of the term "Law" : "Do we gain much or anything by using 'popular language' ? It is true that the 'Reign of Law' summarises to the popular mind the distinctive achievement of modern science, but the moment one asks what this means we get away from the conception of Law as the plain man understands it, and as you, in condescension to his weakness, make use of it. He thinks of Law as something regulative and imposed *ab extra*. But science has, I think, definitely made this conception impossible. It

finds and knows no separate or separable laws—only matter and energy in indissoluble connection. The world as science represents it is not made up out of matter governed by law, but by energetic matter, which acts, not by direction from without, but by the energies of its own nature.” And he would ask the same question as I do in the following form: “Is this world of dynamic reality self-existent, and can we explain from it human nature?”

I need not say that with the substance of this criticism I entirely concur. Laws of Nature are not laws in the sense of direction from without, but, as is stated in the lecture, only observed uniformities. But there is no other expression yet produced which will adequately express the idea science wishes to convey, and I find it used by every scientific writer whose books or articles I have read. I should not be clear to most of my hearers if I did not use the word. Nor, so far as I am aware, is there any point in my argument which depends upon reading into the word Law associations which are not legitimate. It is quite true that all that science knows as yet is that the same things happen in the same circumstances. But how have things come to be such that by the same things happening in the same circumstances a universe has come into being which appears to a mind that is rational to be itself rational?

It used to be held that the proper way to reconcile science and theology was to divide their spheres—God made certain things, and Nature did the rest. This

was a conception which adequately satisfied both the theology and the science of the eighteenth century ; but science informs us that this is now an impossible theory, and, in doing so, is only re-echoing an older and better theology.

This is how Sir Oliver Lodge writes :

“ Is it, then, so simple ? Does the uniformity and the eternity and the self-sustainedness of it make it the easier to understand ? Are we so sure that the guidance and control are not really continuous, instead of being, as we expected, intermittent ? May we not be looking at the working of the Manager all the time and at nothing else ? Why should He step down and interfere with Himself ? That is the lesson science has to teach theology—to look for the action of the Deity, if at all, then always ; not in the past alone, nor only in the future, but equally in the present. If His action is not visible now, it never will be, and never has been visible.”<sup>1</sup>

I must take exception to the words “ science has to teach theology.” I should rather put it, “ science may learn from theology.” At any rate such a doctrine was taught by Thomas Aquinas many hundreds of years before science thought of it. In the *Summa contra Gentiles de Unitate Catholicae Fidei*, III. lxvii—lxx., he argues, first, that all things work through the power of God, *omne igitur operans operatur per virtutem Dei*. But

<sup>1</sup> *The Reconciliation between Science and Faith*. By Sir Oliver Lodge, D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S. *The Hibbert Journal*, I., 2, p. 214.

this does not take away their proper action from created things, *non igitur auferimus proprias actiones rebus creatis, quamvis omnes effectus rerum creatarum Deo attribuamus quasi in omnibus operanti.* For it is not that things are done partly by natural, partly by Divine causes. In every action both causes are complete. *Patet etiam quod non sic idem effectus causae naturali et divinae virtuti attribuitur quasi partim a Deo, partim a naturali agente fiet, sed totus ab utroque secundum alium modum sicut idem effectus totus attribuitur instrumento et principali agenti etiam totus.* No doubt the science of the schoolman would seem strangely expressed nowadays ; but for theology to claim that God is everywhere and is always Himself working in and through natural causes is not a novel doctrine, made to meet an apologetic need, but has always been part of her teaching.

There is one more point on which a few words of explanation are necessary. There is no word that puzzles and frightens a certain number of persons so much as "authority." When Mr. Balfour introduced it into his work on the *Foundations of Belief*, his critics were up in arms and began to scent ecclesiasticism. As a matter of fact he was quite right in recognising that all beliefs, whether of science, of morals, or of faith, must rest ultimately on some authority. In the following pages 'authority' is always used, not of what is antagonistic to reason, but of what commends itself to reason. Scientific beliefs have authority in so far as we are satisfied with the processes by

which they are attained. So with regard to religion, we look from what source we attain our knowledge of Divine things, and what is the authority on which we believe them. That authority is for most Christians—Protestant or Catholic—the living voice of their Church; from this they receive a system of doctrine and life and the Bible, which contains the credentials of their Church. So long as doubt, or enquiry, or comparison are absent; so long as the teaching they have accepted corresponds to their spiritual and intellectual nature, they do not doubt the authority. But a time for enquiry may come. It is the purpose of this Lecture to sketch the lines of such an enquiry, and to suggest the rational grounds on which and the limits within which we may accept the authority of Scripture, Tradition, and the Church as giving us knowledge of Divine things. Only let it be clearly understood that there can be no authority which does not commend itself to our reason and work in us through our reason.

But if I should continue further I should far exceed the limits of a Preface.



# THE SOURCES AND AUTHORITY OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

## I

ANY one who at the present day is appointed a professor of Dogmatic Theology will find himself confronted with a task which has within recent years immensely increased in difficulty. To a very large number of persons the branch of knowledge which he professes appears to be something quite useless and unreal. Its name has an offensive ring ; it deals with a subject matter which is held to have no existence except in words, and to have no relation to the actual realities of life ; and the sources of this supposed knowledge are held to be destitute of any claims to authority.

It is difficult to estimate how far in popular conception a prejudice may be created by a name. No doubt theologians have often been improperly dogmatic in defence of incorrect opinions, just as many men of science were very improperly dogmatic against the dogma of evolution. The only popular use of the word "dogmatic" is as an epithet condemning a certain habit of mind, and to many persons the phrase "dog-

matic theology" comes inevitably with a number of associations which are quite adventitious. A science professor who discusses the principles of science would be looked upon with suspicion if his subject were called dogmatic science, and if a professor of dogmatic theology were said to lecture on the "truths" or "principles" of theology, a good deal of quite uncalled for opposition would be disarmed. Yet, as it is needless for me to remind you, this would be a perfectly correct description of his work. His business is to investigate, to expound, and to systematise those truths about God and human destiny, whether derived from nature or revelation, which should be believed. A dogma means a truth to be believed, and is just as much applicable to the truths of science as of theology.

But it will be argued at once—Science deals with realities, Theology deals only with a system of words and ideas. It is concerned with a number of controversies about things which have no relation at all to human life. Such an attitude may have been partially justified from an inadequate representation of theology, or from that want of perspective which comes from confusing the words and formulas on which controversy has turned with the fundamental truths which are really its subject matter. A very little consideration will show that, although it may be true that many controversies have been unnecessary, and that an excessive love of definitions seems sometimes to have obscured the main issue, yet a theology which is undogmatic is impossible. It may be quite right that our beliefs should be simpler



and less well-defined than were those of the schoolmen, but even the most rudimentary discussion on religious or moral topics implies a dogmatic belief. We may banish the Apostles' Creed, but the first two words of the Lord's Prayer are meaningless unless we have a theology. We cannot in any real sense use these words unless we believe in the existence of God, and in that relationship between Him and mankind, which is generally expressed theologically by the phrase "The Fatherhood of God." But in these two propositions we have all the elements of a very wide and far-reaching theology.

The subject-matter of theology includes the existence and nature of God ; the source and extent of man's knowledge of God ; the relation of man to God ; the relation of God to man ; the aim and destiny of human life. It is obvious that the answers to questions on subjects such as these are, and must be, of tremendous importance for men. All human life and conduct turns on them. It is necessary here, as much as elsewhere, to have careful and exact thinking, and so long as language continues to be the vehicle for the expression of human thought to have accurate language for the expression of thought.

It is quite true that there have been periods when dogmatic theology has got into a narrow groove and has been divorced from the realities of human life, but the same can be said of philosophy, of science, of literature, and of classical scholarship. That, however, is no reason for supposing that shallow thought and slovenly expression can be a substitute for trained thinking. A

steam engine can never be constructed by popular science, although science may be quite capable of popular expression; and the life and conduct of a nation can never be regulated by inexact thinking, although a preacher must be able to expound the teaching he is attempting to realise in language that his hearers can understand.

I do not believe that any thoughtful person, who is prepared in any way to admit the claims of religion, will really think that dogmatic theology is unnecessary. Religion is the most powerful force in the elevation of human life, and it must be of the greatest importance that the religious beliefs should be healthy and true. But a second objection is not that theology is useless, but that however useful it may be it is untrue; that the sources from which it is derived are destitute of authority. A theologian in older days found a comparatively straightforward and simple task before him. He had certain documents, the Old Testament, the New Testament, and if he were a high churchman the Fathers, and he might use them very much in the way that a lawyer uses his cases. He could build up his theology by citing authorities. Difficulty and controversy might and did arise as to the exact limits of the authority and the interpretation of its meaning, but the authority and sources of his teaching were invariably accepted. But a theologian nowadays, if he is to win at all a wide acceptance for his conclusions, must begin by a very careful examination of his sources. He will no longer

find anything taken for granted. There was controversy between Romanist, Protestant, and Anglican as to the exact authority of the Fathers, but all alike would agree on the authority of Scripture. Now it is just that authority which is not only attacked by outsiders, but doubted largely by theologians themselves. The real question (often concealed by subsidiary controversies) is what ground have we for believing that the system of belief based upon the Bible is true? In what sense can we rely upon it as the main source of our knowledge of divine things?

As an introduction to a course of lectures on dogmatic theology, a review becomes necessary of the results of human thought and knowledge, so far as they affect our religious beliefs. It is claimed that changes have been produced by the discoveries of science, by the criticism of philosophy, by the application of historical methods to the study of the Old and New Testaments and by the altered view which recent investigation gives us of the growth and development of the theology of the Church. It is these questions that I propose to consider, unfortunately very cursorily, to-day.

## II

What is the influence of the discoveries of Natural Science on Religious Belief? Some persons would tell us that, if we only knew it, science has made religion in any real sense of the word impossible. It has evolved a new theory of the universe in which there is no room

for a divine being, it has completely changed our ideas of human motive, and will shortly formulate, if it has not done so already, a new standard of conduct. I need not say that I do not believe this. To my mind, the discoveries of science not only do not, but cannot, touch the fundamental truths of religion ; they deal with quite a different sphere of things. So far as they have changed our view of the world it is to substitute a really religious view for the old half mythological conceptions, while for the control of conduct religious principles are as necessary as they ever have been.

Science, as I understand it, in distinction from metaphysics, starts with taking the world as it is. It assumes within its own sphere the validity of our human intelligence, and the reality of the external world as a practical hypothesis, and it is quite content with the verification of its results which experience gives. It deals with the world of which we have knowledge directly or indirectly through the senses ; it assumes that (for its purpose) that knowledge, although limited, is adequate. It investigates the character of this world of which we have cognisance by our senses and applies, often very successfully, the result of its investigations to the amelioration of human life. Now, working on this basis, what has it achieved ?

Using popular language, and recognising the limitations of that language, we may say that science has taught us the Reign of Law in the universe, that the whole visible universe has grown to be what it is by the working and development of what are in themselves singularly simple laws or ascertained uniformities ; and that while the greater our knowledge of the universe the

more wonderful its complexity appears, the greater the advance of science the simpler do we find the laws of its working. The difference between the old conception and the new might be shown by one instance. According to the former, every individual species in the animal and vegetable kingdom could only be accounted for by a special creation, a special manifestation of divine power. Modern science, by the powers of the microscope, has revealed to us organic nature as something infinitely more complex than anything we had ever conceived, but at the same time it tells us that all this infinite complexity has been developed, by the action of quite simple laws and by processes which are continually being better understood, from the individual organic cell of an amœba-like animal. There is no room for any special creation. There are gaps in our knowledge still to fill up, gaps which may never be filled up, but scientific imagination, passing it is true out of the region of proved conclusions, has clearly conceived the possibility of reducing all our knowledge of nature to one single principle. It assumes the development of the whole solar system from some primeval vapour, the development of life from the chemical combination of physical substances, the development of man from the lower animals. It would maintain that the chain of development is continuous, and that there is probably no room anywhere for any special manifestation of creative power. Somehow or other life has come out of matter and mind out of life in ways which we may not be able to understand, but which are for all that simply natural processes.

But if we ask the origin or the cause of the universe, to that science can give no answer. All such problems are, so far as it is concerned, just as much unsolved as ever. It shows us a wonderful process continuously working, but the origin of that process remains unknown. The old question remains but has to be asked differently. We no longer ask, what intelligence was sufficient to make the world as it is, but what intelligence was sufficient to initiate and inspire a universe which could come to be what it is. In all these discoveries there is nothing which militates against the belief in a God, a divine intelligence, as Creator. It is just as true as ever it was to say that our mind cannot conceive the existence of the universe without a cause for its existence; it cannot conceive the existence of what bears so strongly the marks of being rational without believing it the creation of intelligence; it cannot conceive the existence of mind without a Cause which is infinitely more rational than the Reason which has sprung from its creation. To me the more wonderful Nature is shown to be, the more infinitely complex in its manifestations, the more simple in its laws, so much the more does it lead me back to the necessary belief in a Creator, a Divine Reason, who through the countless ages has been working in and through the laws by which He is making the universe, whose divine power has been shown, not in the breaches of a physical law, which is looked upon as something outside Himself, but in the working of the Law which is His creature, His servant, the manifestation of His Being. Metaphysics may still be able to criticise, as it

has criticised in the past, the validity of this argument, but science cannot, for it is beyond the limits of science; and scientific research has not made it less but more cogent, for it has revealed a manifestation of divine power far more worthy of its divine origin than any which the human mind had hitherto conceived.

I am not of course prepared to assert either that life is but a higher manifestation of force, or that the human mind has been evolved directly out of life. What I do feel is that the utmost possible development of science in this direction is not anything to be conceded grudgingly, that a basis for Christian apologetics ought not to be found in the present limitations of science, for its present limitations are often its future triumphs. The more science can discover, the greater will become the need of the divine Creator to be the source and guide of the universe, not the less. Nor, again, does it seem to me that there is any reason to limit the manifestation of divine power to organic life. We may know perfectly and accurately the laws in accordance with which a crystal is formed, and may understand completely its molecular construction, but that should not blind us to the fact that the wonderful thing is that there should be laws (or whatever we call them) by which the crystal is produced. The thought of this demands an adequate explanation as much as the complicated structure of the human eye, and the adequate explanation must be one which recognises the element of reason.

Such a conception of Nature as we have had in our mind does not banish the idea of a God working in and

through the universe any more than it banishes the idea of God as a Creator. Although there is a physical cause for every phenomenon, and because that cause is a general law, the whole infinitely complicated scheme of the universe may equally in every detail and in the whole scheme represent the workings of an infinite intelligence.

The controller of a complicated piece of machinery always works by mechanical laws, but any movement of that machinery is the direct result of a controlling mind, which attains its aim, not by interfering with but by using the mechanical appliances, and so the whole universe may quite well be looked upon on one side as simply the outcome of the working of certain well-known laws (as we call them), but regarded from the other, be simply the manifestation of an infinite intelligence. Whether this be so or not may demand further proof, is, in fact, in itself incapable of proof; what I am at present concerned to maintain is that no discovery which science has yet made, and no discovery which it is conceivable that it could make, in any way interferes with such a conception. The religious aspect of the universe is not something antagonistic to the scientific aspect, but something quite consistent with it. It does not require a different set of facts but is merely a different way of looking at the same facts.

I think that I am justified in quoting, as agreeing with what has been said so far (although probably he would not accept all that I have to say), some words of one of our scientific professors :—

“When we know,” he writes, “that the protoplasmic folk who spin, though lacking wheels, and weave though



wanting looms, without intercommunication or moving from the place where each is chained—when I understand that each lays down his microscopical length of thread in the precise manner needed and designed by the idea of the whole, formulated by the will of the Law governing the life of each working cell, we are silent in deep worship of this eternal, ever revealing Law, in whose service we men and women are also enlisted. We hardly then dare exclaim, ‘How beautiful!’ but fall silently on our knees as if in tacit prayer to the Unknown for some closer touch with its infinite life.”<sup>1</sup>

There are other aspects of the relation of science and theology which might be discussed. All that I wish at this point to contend is that scientific discovery cannot interfere with the realm of theology. So far as theology is concerned science is absolutely free; and so far as science is concerned theology may pursue its own way. Science can produce no valid argument against the existence of a God, nor do the further discoveries of science alter in any real way the position of the question. At the same time it is true that scientific investigation has made it very hard for many men of science to believe. A friend of mine of considerable scientific attainments once said to me, “I do not believe that science proves anything contrary to the truth of religion, or, indeed, of Christianity; but it is true that the study of science makes it very difficult indeed for most of us to believe.” These words, I think, express exactly

<sup>1</sup> *The Religious Sense in its Scientific Aspect.* By Greville Macdonald, M.D., p. 104.

the truth. Just as to the mediæval hagiologist who compiled the Golden Legend the belief in scientific method and scientific law would have been impossible, for his mind was so filled with a different aspect of the world which he would have thought that experience had verified for him, that there was no room in it for new truths ; so many a man at the present day is so completely absorbed with all his intellectual powers in investigating the laws of nature, that for him there is no room for anything else. But truth is not limited by the calibre of a man's brain ; and just as science is true in spite of the disbelief of a mediæval or modern hagiologist, so religion may be true even though the religious sense may be atrophied by a one-sided attention to the investigation of the natural causes of things.

And what is true of some individual man of science is equally true of the intellectual tendency of the day. It is sometimes said that this is a Positive Age. Our attention is directed often in what is clearly a disproportionate degree towards what is purely material. Our whole mind becomes absorbed in certain aspects of truth, and finds it difficult to care for, or grasp, or realise any other. So in the case of many people nowadays, their whole interest is devoted to the discoveries of science, or the application of scientific knowledge to the amelioration of the conditions of human life, and they do not care for the more spiritual aspect of the world or for spiritual truths, which are not in the least inconsistent with their ruling conceptions. But this banishment of the spiritual does not depend upon, and is not justified by, any logical method. The exces-

sive pursuit of pleasure deadens our minds to moral truths ; but the moral truths are true all the same. A one-sided pursuit of science may deaden our minds to religious truths ; but religion may still be true, still necessary for human life, and the investigation of its truths and principles just as important as it ever has been.

### III

I do not propose to say much about the relation of theology to the various branches of mental and moral philosophy, both because in many directions there is little new—philosophy still gives the strongest arguments for religious belief and suggests the most real difficulties—and because metaphysics themselves, equally with theology, exist only on sufferance in the opinion of many thinkers. Philosophy at present, to one who is not a philosopher, seems to speak with rather an uncertain sound. If the older sensationalism has made way for idealism, idealism is giving way in many minds to some form of realism, while coincidentally scientific methods are laying their hands on psychology, claiming to wrest it from metaphysics, and suggesting that here, too, science will solve the problems which have defeated the less exact methods of the past. It is only possible therefore to touch on two or three leading points.

A new, or apparently new, departure meets us in experimental psychology. Its value and capabilities it is difficult at present to appraise. To the physician and

to medical science it will, it seems to me, be of the greatest value in the future ; to education it may be of service if it is combined with the saving common-sense so often absent from educational theorists. But no doubt its advocates claim more for it than this. I do not believe myself that it touches, or can touch, the fundamental problems of life. We have always known that when we worked our brain our feet had a tendency to become cold, and that any violent emotion had definite physical effects. If these physical results of mental action can be worked out quantitatively there will be a definite gain to science. We know, indeed, that mind influences body and body mind. We have always recognised that our intellectual equipment is dependent on a physical basis. But the problem of how the physical changes in brain-stuff are translated into the facts of mental consciousness is not any nearer solution than it was before, however accurately we may measure mental phenomena. The mechanism of the brain does not account for the intellectual life which uses it, any more than the mechanism of a motor-car accounts for the intelligence which directs it. Even if in a sense it is true that consciousness is the product of evolution, just as we know that it is evolved in each individual, the process of the acquirement does not explain the fact of existence. When God breathed first into man the breath of conscious life, as He breathes it still into each individual, it was as much His work, if He accomplished it through the energy of Nature which is His energy, as it would have been had He to interfere with that energy. Consciousness is a fact, and a

fact that requires metaphysics for its explanation, for the mystery is that that which, from one point of view, is part of the stream of existence, from another point of view is something outside of that stream, combining, creating, unifying the very world of which it is a part.

It was the great service of Professor Green to idealist philosophy that he showed, in a way which seemed to many of us conclusive, that the older sensationalism gained no real support from the fact of evolution, and that it still remains an inadequate explanation of the facts of mental and moral life. That idealist philosophy gives a perfectly adequate basis upon which a system of Christian theology may be built up, has generally, in spite of the efforts of Mr. Bradley, been recognised. It is not necessary for me to go over such well known ground. A recent exposition of such a basis for belief has been made by Dr. Rashdall in *Contentio Veritatis*. It is a lucid statement of the principles of idealism, and an able defence of Christian theology. It is not indeed entirely convincing. For it fails, from a certain element of dogmatism, and an almost excessive logical completeness which suggests a feeling of unreality. We wonder after all when we have read it whether this conception of the universe so unlike our ordinary ideas is really true.

For somehow, many of those who used to be strong idealists are not so now. They are beginning, strange as it may seem, to drift into realism. To me the argument which seems to lead in that direction is something as follows. It is quite true that all I know of the external

world is my consciousness of that world, but after all how does it come about that so many other minds share that consciousness, and express it just as I do, and that they can analyse it, as I analyse it, and that they think of it as I think of it? Does not this multiplicity of *egos*, of the existence of which my *ego* gives me information, sharing the same impression of something which they believe to be external, imply a reality in that outside world of which they have an impression? If I alone see a thing, I do not know anything about its reality. My glasses may be coloured. But have all men coloured glasses? So I begin to believe that the cause of my consciousness of what is external to me is that there is an external thing of which I have not indeed a perfect but an adequate knowledge. A realism of this sort is probably most in accordance with the spirit of the age, but realism is not materialism. We only arrive at a belief in the reality of the causes of our sensations by assuming the reality of our mind. And it is only if the mind be real that we can explain the existence of the science which would try and explain away mind. The analysis of consciousness which is at the basis of idealism remains true when idealism changes into realism, and to explain the facts of mind some hypothesis is required as much as to explain the existence of a rational universe. Just as when we were examining the facts of the universe we suggested that they might be explained by the hypothesis which theology supplies, so is it true of mind. We cannot prove the truths of theology in any way in which we can the truths of science, for science is an analysis of the experience of our senses, and religion

deals with what is beyond the cognisance of our senses ; but whether we look at the fact of a rational universe or of a mind which can have cognisance of that fact, or of the moral instincts of that mind, of all these facts the explanation given by theology is adequate. Philosophy asks certain questions and sets certain problems. Of these problems Theology gives us a solution. God, Nature, the human soul—the belief in these may still be the most rational solution of the problem of existence.

One more service philosophy renders to theology. While it quite rightly reminds us of the absence of strict logical proof of much that theology rightly puts forward as an adequate explanation, it at the same time reminds us also of the futility of much popular or semi-popular criticism. The truths or statements of theology must clearly often be beyond the real grasp of the human mind. That that is so is certainly no ground for not accepting them. The one thing certain, where so much is uncertain, is the limitation of the human mind. That we cannot understand a thing is clearly no reason why it should not be true. Our human intellect is limited by a very narrow experience. Before all that transcends that experience an attitude of reverent agnosticism, an agnosticism which may be the quite adequate basis of belief is most in accordance with the limits of our intelligence, and our consciousness of the inadequacy of our mental equipment. Religion becomes a reality because we know how much there is which we cannot understand.

## IV

So far we have examined the sources of what is commonly called Natural Theology. It has not of course been possible to do so with any completeness, but we have touched on those points on which discovery has been made, or where criticism has been at work. And our conclusion is that recent discovery or speculation has not in any real way altered the problem, and that the hypothesis of a theistic solution is still the one which will most adequately account for all the facts. But if there be a God, He would not have left Himself without witness, and we proceed to examine the different sources of Revealed Religion.

We may pass for our present purpose very lightly over the Revelation of God in the universal religious instinct of the human race. The study of comparative religion and its kindred sciences has been pursued with great ardour during recent years, and a large number of works have been written, many of them clearly having for their object, either to find what is described as a natural basis for religion, or to dethrone Christianity from its unique position, or to point out the analogies in other religions to the customs and ideas of Christianity. To discuss these questions would be beyond our scope; I would only suggest certain propositions which may sum up the attitude that I would adopt towards these studies.

It is quite true on one side that almost every



custom or rite of Judaism or Christianity has its analogy in other religions, and may very probably have a similar source. This was better known to many of the Christian Fathers than it is to us. That did not however in their eyes, nor need it in ours, prove anything against the special revelation in Christianity, because it would be perfectly natural that God should speak to the Jews in the form and manner of existing religious thought, and that our Lord should instruct His followers in accordance with ideas actually existing among them, and not in an entirely new manner.

On the other hand the study of mankind bears witness to religion as something which satisfies certain needs. The advance of a race or nation implies also an advance in religion. Sometimes a nation as it develops itself develops a religion in accordance with its higher needs, sometimes what is higher comes from outside and itself is a factor in determining the elevation of the people. The Christian religion as revealed in Christ represents the goal towards which the aspirations of other nations have tended, and an ideal to which they must ultimately desire to conform. In no way, therefore, is it necessary for us, any more than it was for Fathers like Justin or Clement, to doubt that in a sense there has been in all nations some revelation of God, shown in the gradual development of higher purpose, of purer ideals, and continued moral progress. But nothing in them as a matter of fact takes away from the uniqueness of Christianity. In so far as other religions have been by various investigators brought into competition with it, it has been by interpreting them from a

Christian point of view and reading into their phraseology Christian ideas.

With these few words of preface we pass on to the special Christian revelation as it is presented to us in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the authority of the Christian Church.

There are many nowadays who would be inclined to give up the Old Testament. There are undoubtedly many who feel, that to say the least such an atmosphere of uncertainty has surrounded the Old Testament owing to the results of critical studies, that it is quite unsafe to build anything upon it. Such an attitude is, I believe, quite unnecessary. It is perfectly possible to accept most of the results, even the most adverse results of Old Testament criticism, and not lose in any way its abiding value. The history will be different, the form of revelation will be different, but the value of the theological and moral truths will remain unimpaired. My own belief is indeed that, although many important results of criticism are proved, so far as anything in such subject-matter is capable of proof, yet a great deal is, to say the least, precarious, and some of the newest developments are barely coherent or even sane. But what I wish to emphasise is that the right position is one which allows perfectly free play to every form of critical ingenuity or to all the strange vagaries of archæological apologetics, and at the same time does not give up any of the permanent religious teaching or of the authority on which it is based.

What is the authority of the Old Testament? It sometimes seems almost forgotten amid the storm of controversy that whatever may be the actual date of the various books of the Old Testament, it is quite certain that all or nearly all of them had been written many hundreds of years before the New Testament. They had become canonical, they had been translated into another language, and their meaning had become fixed long before Christianity began. This is after all quite certain, and equally certain are two or three broad propositions which may be deduced from it.

In the first place, the Old Testament taught in a manner quite unique the belief in one God. It may be that it was only by slow degrees that the people of Israel learnt this: that Polytheism made way for Henotheism and through Henotheism was learnt Monotheism. In whatever way it was learnt, and whatever traces there may be in the Bible of less perfect forms of religion and of less adequate conceptions of the deity having prevailed, in any case Monotheism, a high and elevated Monotheism, is the religion of the Old Testament, and of the Old Testament alone in the ancient world. Again the Old Testament combines in a manner which was quite unique religion and morality. The one God whom Israel learnt to worship was a God exalted in righteousness. Here also it is quite true that we can trace progress. It was only gradually that Israel learnt the lesson, and when it is pointed out we can see quite clearly older strata in the Bible which represent the inadequate conceptions out of which the religion of Israel developed. But in any case righteous-

ness, purity and holiness are the notes of the Old Testament religion in marked contrast to the beliefs of surrounding nations.

It was a firm conviction among the Jews that they were in a particular way God's chosen people, and that they had been selected from among the nations, that in them all the families of the earth might be blessed. Whether or no these words were spoken to Abraham, or whether a prophet of the period of the Monarchy chose the story in which they are contained as the most suitable vehicle for expressing a truth which he felt himself permitted to teach, in any case the belief in this divine selection and commission was firmly ingrained in Judaism, and had been so for generations before Christ came. And this special blessing for and through Israel was associated with the expectation of the Messiah. It may be, it probably is, true that many passages supposed to have a Messianic meaning were originally understood to bear a quite different interpretation; it may again be true that the idea grew slowly and from vague beginnings, but it is quite certain that the Old Testament looked forward to the advent of one, to whom the name Messiah came to be given, and it is equally certain that this belief was very strongly held among the Jews long before the Christ came.

And all these hopes and expectations and prophecies were fulfilled in quite an unexpected and unique manner in Christ. It may be that they helped their own fulfilment. This they were probably intended to do. But it does not take away from the wonderful

character of the event. It may be again that the fulfilment was different in many ways from the expectation. It succeeded in a wonderful manner in separating what was of mere temporary validity from what was of permanent value, but that does not detract from the wonder of the sequel. The preparation in the history of the Jews for the coming of Christ in all its manifold variety, and the pure and lofty conception of religion which it puts before us place the stamp of authority on the Old Testament.

I feel, then, that whatever may be the result or development of Old Testament criticism, we are amply justified in accepting its authority as a revelation of religious truth to mankind. But if we accept it, in what way can we use it? Here it seems to me that historical criticism has done a work of very great value. The old unhistorical method, according to which the Old Testament, equally with the New Testament, was looked upon as providing a number of texts which might be used without reference to their context, and without reference to their historical meaning, often even without reference to their grammatical interpretation in order to support or bolster up a system of doctrine, is clearly and definitely condemned. But at the same time the professor of dogmatic theology is not particularly concerned with Jewish history, nor with the historical steps by which the Old Testament theology was evolved, nor with the various strata in the books of the Law. It is his business rather to reconstruct the Old Testament theology as it is represented in the Bible as a whole, as it might be believed and interpreted by the

Jews before the coming of our Lord, as it is presupposed throughout the Gospels. To do so in detail might be difficult, to distinguish the varying beliefs of the different sects of the Jews might be tedious : but the broad facts of Old Testament teaching, the unity of the Godhead, the supremacy of the moral law, the sacrificial system, with its implied lessons of the holiness of God of the sin of man and of the need of atonement, the personal religion of the Psalms, the zeal for righteousness of the Prophets, the orderly ideal of family life depicted in the Wisdom literature—all these, representing as they do the foundations on which our Christian belief was built up, remain untouched by any criticism ; they come to us with an authority which is unimpaired and a value which is undiminished. The limitations of the Old Testament we may learn by the fulfilment in Christ, but its positive value has not been taken away by a criticism which only touches the account of its origin, and the obligation of mankind to its teaching will always remain.

## V

As we progress our work becomes in some ways more difficult, and the issues raised more important and more controverted. We may take many along with us in believing that Nature even with the most rigid scientific interpretation witnesses to something transcendental, that the ultimate lesson of metaphysics is the reality of soul and duty, that the Old Testament is a revelation (whatever revelation may mean) of a sub-

lime Monotheism, but when we reach the New Testament we must come to a parting of the ways, for we have to decide whether for us the revelation in Christ is an unique revelation of what is true or only a stage in human evolution.

There is, indeed, an intermediate position associated with the well-known name of Ritschl in Germany, which would have us believe that although substantially the historical facts on which Christianity is based cannot be accepted yet their theological value remains unimpaired. They have the value which attaches to what is known to be practically beneficial ; they are in fact "value judgments" ; that is, propositions which whether true or not are wholesome, and we must add will have authority only for those who are willing to accept them as true, for they have no external sanction.

I do not believe that this is a position in which people can rest, for the strength and power of Christianity have always depended on the conviction that certain events really did happen. Thus a solid historical foundation was given for truths which otherwise are apart from and unprovable by human experience, and are, therefore, very hard to believe ; for although they may appeal to our higher nature they are repugnant to our lower, and need to come to us supported by some testimony outside themselves in order to gain any universal acceptance. In a sense a man can feel the truths of Christianity as being the embodiment of the highest ideals of our nature, but it is only when he has been educated as a Christian and has formed his judgment in a Christian atmosphere. The Cross was

to the Greeks foolishness, and some people nowadays are beginning to re-echo that sentiment in theory, as they have adhered to it in their practice. I am bound then, as I believe, to show in what sense and how far we can find authority outside itself for the Christian revelation as the source of Christian doctrine.

In the first place, we need have no reasonable doubts about the dates, and to a very large extent about the authorship, of the Books of the New Testament. That I hold, speaking generally, as the clear result of scientific investigation. The Epistles of St. Paul, or almost all of them, are what they profess to be ; the Synoptic Gospels give the story of our Lord's teaching as it comes to us from the first generation of Christian teachers ; the Johannine books were written at latest within a hundred years of our Lord's death. All these are facts which I consider certain, and they by themselves will be enough for our purpose. I need not now go into more disputed or doubtful points.

But here to many minds there is a great difficulty. Historical truth is, they tell us, so uncertain that nothing can be allowed to rest upon it. This is a difficulty which we inherit from the eighteenth century. It is put in its most extreme form in some words of Lessing, which I quote from Professor Harnack : " Historical truth which is accidental in its character, can never become the proof of the truths of reason, which are necessary." Put in this form, it could not appeal to us at the present day, for it is associated with a metaphysic which we should hardly be able to accept, but the feeling which it represents is still very strong.



To many minds there is something uncertain, almost unreal, about events which are past and gone, and they feel that it is hardly possible to prove anything by them. The fault is perhaps partly one of imagination. A very good modern illustration of this type of scepticism is given by Professor Percy Gardner's books. To him historical truth is in any real sense unattainable, and he would support his theology on a psychological as opposed to an historical basis. Of history, he writes as follows :—

“First, then, of historic criticism. This is a destructive force, and a force of immense power. It is liable to become historic scepticism, and if exercised unduly may reduce the fabric of history, at all events of ancient history, to a heap of ruins. For the fabric of history is not adapted to sustain the assault of methods which are reasonable when applied to things physical and visible. We cannot cross-question historic characters as we could question witnesses in a law court. Thus a direct attack on any supposed fact, if forced home, can seldom be met.”<sup>1</sup>

This general statement is then illustrated by a particular instance :—

“It is, however, quite obvious that even in regard to outward and visible events we shall comparatively seldom be able to arrive at perfect certainty. Take an event of the present century witnessed by thousands, of whom a few were lately alive, the battle of Waterloo. Of that event there are a multitude of quite inconsistent accounts in existence, between which it is difficult or

<sup>1</sup> *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 127. By Percy Gardner. London, 1899.

impossible to make choice. How, then, can we hope to reach objective truth in regard to events further from us?"<sup>1</sup>

I have quoted this second passage because the deductions that I should make from it are the exact opposite to what Professor Gardner makes. It shows to my mind how absolutely unimportant to the truth of history are the minor difficulties to which such importance is here attached. We know that there are many different stories of events which happened at Waterloo, and some of them are quite inconsistent with one another. On many minor points there are curious discrepancies in the evidence. But in spite of that we are absolutely certain about every fact of real importance. That the battle was fought, that the French army was defeated, that great political changes were the result, all these are quite as certain as any fact or law of science. They are certain because we have not only the evidence as to what actually did happen, but we have also the corroborative testimony of all history before and after. Even if by any curious accident every direct historical reference to the battle of Waterloo were eliminated from our authorities, we should still be able to prove that some such event had happened by the testimony of previous and subsequent history. The discrepancies in the narratives are as unimportant as the individual errors of scientific observers.

Now exactly the same argument will be true of the foundation of Christianity. Something similar to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

events recorded in the Gospels must have happened. You cannot explain subsequent history unless they did. Take one fact. How otherwise can you explain the new meaning and significance attached to the word "Cross." It is only explicable on the hypothesis that our Lord died (as is recorded) on the Cross, and that in some way or other his disciples learnt of the victory of the Cross. And the same method of argument that applies to the life of Christ as a whole I would apply to the crucial fact of the Resurrection. It is quite true that there are difficulties in harmonising the various narratives, as there are difficulties in knowing exactly what happened at Waterloo. It is extremely improbable that the accounts of such an event would be any more clear and coherent than are the accounts of the details of a battle. People might be quite certain that they had had an unique experience which had influenced their whole spiritual life, yet just because of its extraordinary character discrepancies would arise in the exact accounts of the experiences. And the evidence for the Resurrection and the other transcendental events which are associated with it lies, not only in the actual narrative, not only in certain corroborative details, as the empty grave, but in the subsequent history of those who had seen the risen Lord. We know what the Apostles were, we know how the betrayal and crucifixion influenced them, we know what they became. The cause of the transformation lies just in those passages and events recorded in the New Testament records, which thus fit harmoniously and naturally into their places.

And in exactly the same way the Gospel narrative and revelation in all its completeness fits into its proper place in universal history. We know that in some way or other a tremendous change was wrought. It is very commonly stated nowadays that the Christ of the Gospels was the creation of the Christian Church. The difficulty that such a statement leaves is that some adequate cause is necessary to explain the creation of that Church. We may put it in another way. In St. Paul's Epistles we have a clear picture of the teaching and position of the Church when they were written, a picture not only of what St. Paul taught, but also of what he shared with his contemporaries. We have to find an adequate cause for the growth in a period of about thirty years of all this body of life and doctrine.

On critical grounds, then, I do not feel that there is any call to substitute for the traditional story a new theory which would compel us to reconstruct out of our own imaginations a new Christ. I am prepared to accept the New Testament as the record of an unique Revelation, and to use it as an authoritative source of religious truth. But as to the manner in which it should be used, a very considerable change has slowly been effected.

It would take us too long to work out in detail the history and growth of the historical method of interpretation. It has even yet been very little grasped by most people, and the habit still widely prevails of using the Bible—Old and New Testament alike—just as it suits a man's purpose. According to the old method, the Bible represents a theological code or

text, the words of which may be quoted and applied without any regard to the contents of the passage. In opposition to this there is a very definite historical method of using it with which we have been practised in our classical studies. Before we develop the permanent value of anything that is said, we try and reconstruct for ourselves the exact meaning of the writer from his own point of view and in accordance with the thought of the times. When that is done, when we know what was the meaning of the words of Christ as recorded in the different Gospels, what was the interpretation of them given by the different Apostles, and have worked out the origin and history of our religious beliefs, then, but not till then, are we in a position to ask what is the dogmatic system of Christianity.

The method is longer than the older way of dealing with the Bible; it is also more interesting. It will not, I believe, change or alter our conception of the Christian Creed, but on a large number of subordinate points, just those points on which Christians have been divided, it will probably be necessary for us to give up favourite texts and favourite misinterpretations of texts, and it will be found that the New Testament often affords no solid ground for any decision on many debated points. The various systems of partisan Christianity which have been built up on isolated texts, on passages wrongly interpreted, on the misuse of the Old and New Testament alike, will gradually be found to be untenable. On the other hand, a great deal of harm has been done in recent years by the manner in which crude critical theories have been seized upon and made use of

in partisan interests by persons who are quite unacquainted with the grounds for them. Our greatest hope for the future lies in the gradual growth and spread of a sober, wise, historical criticism which may both in its method and temper check and retard sectarian partisanship.

## VI

But it is impossible to limit our authority for Christianity to the Bible and the New Testament. Christianity is what it has become, and even if we would we cannot cut ourselves adrift from the Christian Past. At the time of the Reformation the attempt was made to appeal to the Bible and the Bible only as the religion of Protestants. The only result was to build up a number of inconsistent Protestant systems the whole scope and contents of which were determined by mediæval theology. Our beliefs are always conditioned by inherited teaching even if we revolt from it.

The authority of the Christian Church is claimed in two directions—Christian tradition, and the theology of the Catholic Church.

The controversy between the authority of Christian tradition and that of Scripture is one which is exceedingly unprofitable, for the antithesis is a false one. The Scriptures are simply a part of the Church tradition. But there is a real question of great importance, and that is, what Church traditions have we of a reliable character outside. I remember a conversation which

I once had with a Russian monk in which he discussed the imperfections of the English Church. St. Paul, he said, tells you that even if an angel from heaven should bid you change any of those things which I have delivered to you, you should not do so. "You have changed many things; we, we have changed nothing from the beginning." That is the claim put in its most extreme form. Now undoubtedly there was in the Church for many centuries an uninterrupted tradition of church life, and a Christian in the fourth century would have believed that the existing ecclesiastical system was based upon apostolic custom. Can that claim be made good? The answer must be in any sense in which he would have intended it, No. We can, as a matter of fact, trace historically the development of most of the elements of that system. There is quite a distinct difference in considerable detail between the church systems of the second and fourth centuries, a difference sufficient to justify us in assuming that the existence of a custom in the fourth century is no proof of its apostolic origin.

But while the appeal to tradition is not true in this exact sense, in another, it is a fact of very great importance.

Neither our ecclesiastical system nor our theological beliefs are ultimately derived from the Bible. For nearly thirty years Christianity was preached, and the Christian Church was in existence before any books of the New Testament were written; it was another twenty or thirty years before they came into at all general use; it was sixty or seventy years before they

became authoritative, and at least one hundred years before there was a definite canon of Scripture. During these years the Christian belief and practice was based on, and developed, the apostolic teaching. We know that in its substantial form it was the same as that which we accept to-day, because it has its reflection in the different apostolic writings, but Christianity was not derived from them, nor the Church system, nor the proportion and form of Christian doctrine. While then it is not safe to accept anything as certainly true which is not witnessed to by Scripture, because a tradition, if living, is always changing, on the other hand, the Church tradition is an independent witness to the apostolic teaching, and it is the tradition which gives us the true proportion of apostolic teaching and practice. The Epistle to the Romans, for example, is not engaged in a discussion concerning the Christian Faith ; it presupposes in its readers the possession of it, and discusses certain great questions which arise from it. When the Reformation theologians, then, attempted to construct their theories on the basis of this Epistle, it was not that their expositions were erroneous so much as that they distorted the proportions of the Christian Faith ; they exalted subordinate questions into primary. So also to me the whole of modern German theology has suffered because it has taken as its starting point the teaching of Luther, rather than the teaching of Christ as represented by the Apostles.

May I give an illustration of what I mean from a question which is very much before us at the present day? The belief in the Virgin-birth is part of the



Christian creed, and as we may judge from the testimony of Ignatius was part of that creed in his day. Now, there is no reason to think that it found its way there from the Gospels, in which the narratives of the event are recorded; but the Christian tradition, like the narratives in the Gospels, bears witness to something earlier than either. It is quite clear that neither of the Gospel narratives was derived from the other, and therefore they give independent witness to a prevailing belief which is also witnessed to by the Church tradition.

The Christian tradition, then, is a guide of absolute importance in interpreting the Christian revelation, and this revelation has been transformed into a theology by the Christian Church.

It is a great advantage or disadvantage, as you will, that we should have had in one of the most important theological works of the present day the very elaborate indictment of the whole development of Christianity given us by Professor Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte*. The object of that work is quite clearly to undermine the authority of the traditional dogmatic theology. To judge from many comments on it which I have read, it is apparent that a great deal of it which was a commonplace to the theologian has come as something quite fresh to many readers, and has received an undue amount of attention. It is quite true that our formulated theology is the result of the Greek intellect, assisted by Greek philosophy, working on the Hebrew revelation. It is quite true that all down the Christian ages there has been a development of the meaning of

the Christian message, and that human speculation is mingled with the exact words of the New Testament. But surely this crude condemnation of what is Hellenic is quite unjustified, whether from a Christian or a philosophical point of view. The Christian remembers the words in St. John's Gospel, "He will guide you into all truth." He believes that it is a far grander conception to hold that all the wealth of the human intellect and all the product of the highest human thought have been employed in interpreting and explaining the truth once for all delivered to the Saints, and he would accept the authority of the Church of the early centuries as of the Church of the Middle Ages and of more modern times. It is quite true that we demand something absolutely simple as sufficient for our salvation, but the Christian creed has always been simple, and does not claim as necessary for salvation anything which is not implied in the frank acceptance of Christ as the Son of God. But, although the fundamental Christian belief is simple, no mind is satisfied without explanation and definition, and the work and thought of the Christian Church is part of the Christian heritage. The criticisms of Professor Harnack are often unjust and shallow, and it seems a strange service to employ all the knowledge and intellect of the nineteenth century to try and eliminate the intellectual elements from Christianity.

The doctrine of the Trinity is clearly in a sense a development. The teaching of Augustine on that doctrine is still further a development, but the whole Christian conception of God is brought out in tremendous fulness when he sums up the doctrine of the Trinity in

the revelation of Love. His basis is the revelation of Christ. This had been interpreted by three centuries of Christian thought, by all the subtlety of the Hellenic mind, and the power of the Greek language. He inherits the fruits of heathen philosophy ; his mind is enriched with the most profound spiritual experience, and he puts before us the most sublime conceptions of the Godhead which the human mind has ever been able to conceive.

The authoritative decrees of the Church formulated, in language which has not been and is not likely to be improved upon, the fundamental belief in Christ's message. The teaching of the Church has presented in every age the meaning of this message, interpreting it as it could in the language of the day. The student of the history of dogmatic theology inherits all the teaching of the past. He must distinguish what is temporary and accidental and imperfect and incomplete from what has been taken up by the conscience of the Church as a whole. He realises how each age has its faults, and each age has corrected the faults of other days. He is like a wise steward giving out of his treasure things new and old. Guided by the teaching of the past, weighing well all that has come down to him, he will attempt to interpret for his own age the Christian revelation which is true for all ages.

## VII

The sources of our theology then are the continuous revelation of the Old Testament as accepted in the New, the revelation of Christ in the New Testament, the

witness of Christian tradition, and the living voice of the Christian Church. I do not believe that the results of recent discovery will be found to impair its authority, but the method of the theologian will be to a certain extent changed by critical and historical research. Using these methods, it is his business to teach the contents of the Christian revelation as answering the needs and corresponding to the aspirations of the present day as of past days.

But I suppose that to many persons doubts will arise as to the value of all this. There have been periods in our history when the discussion and study of dogmatic questions has been the most serious and absorbing intellectual interest of the age; at the present day the interest has largely gone. Even many of those who are religious would be satisfied with a somewhat vague and half-expressed religious feeling. No doubt an untrue or disproportioned theology has done harm, but that only makes a wise theology more important. I would put it to you, is it not true that a right hold of the spiritual realities of life is the one absolutely important thing for a nation, and the character and future of a nation will largely depend upon the reality and truth of its spiritual life? There are trivialities in theology as in science. Theology, like philosophy, may have degenerated into word-splitting. But theology deals with the most tremendous issues and with beliefs which have transformed human nature. And the judgment of history would be on our side. How much both of the greatness and the limitations of the Scottish character are due to their theological training? What does not

America owe to the moral strength of the Puritan settlers in New England? I believe that a great deal of our English national character has been due to the fact that a large portion of the nation has been trained on the two great facts of "faith" and "duty." And I believe that if, in obedience to the intolerance of secularism, the nation gives up that basis for a meaningless and invertebrate unsectarianism, it will be an infinitely greater disaster than an unsuccessful war or an unwise fiscal policy. For it touches the very nerve of national life.

A nation's greatness depends upon its character, its character largely depends upon its religious beliefs, and all onesidedness and error in its beliefs are reflected in its life. The office and work of any one who is called on to teach dogmatic theology is as important as ever it was, and to restate the great truths which are always the same yet always changing in their aspect is, however little it may be realised, one of the most grand and most important of duties, and all the more just when it harmonises little with the thoughts and aims of the age.

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