

THE RIGHT OF  
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



PROFESSOR B. B. WARFIELD, D. D.

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THE RIGHT  
OF  
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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*WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY*  
PROFESSOR J. ORR, D.D., EDINBURGH

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## NOTE OF COMMENDATION

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PROFESSOR WARFIELD of Princeton is well known on both sides of the Atlantic. He has rendered special service in the interest of Systematic Theology; and his defence of the "Right" of that science in a recent number of *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, which he edits, has appeared to us well worthy of a wider circulation in this country than it can hope to have in a journal published in America.

This explains the issue of the present book, which we commend to the attention of all who have in any degree realised the importance of the subject.

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# INTRODUCTION

BY THE

REV. PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.  
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SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY has fallen on evil days. To her may be applied, with scarcely a change of a word, what Kant in the Preface to his famous *Critique* says of metaphysics: "Time was when she was the queen of all the sciences, and if we take the will for the deed, she certainly deserves, so far as regards the high importance of her object-matter, this title of honour. Now it is the fashion of the time to heap contempt and scorn upon her, and the matron mourns, forlorn and forsaken, like Hecuba—

‘ Modo maxima rerum,  
Tot generis, natisque potens . . .  
Nunc trahor exul, inops.’<sup>1</sup>

But a subsequent sentence also of this great thinker may be applied to theology: "For it is in

<sup>1</sup> "So lately the greatest woman in the world, powerful in so many sons-in-law and children . . . now I am dragged away an exile, destitute."

reality vain," he says, "to profess indifference in regard to such inquiries, the object of which cannot be indifferent to humanity. Besides, these pretended indifferents, however much they may try to disguise themselves by the assumption of a popular style and by changes on the language of the schools, undoubtedly fall into [theological] declarations and propositions, which they profess to regard with so much contempt."

The grounds on which a denial of the right of Systematic Theology to exist is based are various, but they may at bottom all be reduced to one—the denial of the existence of an adequate foundation on which such a structure can be reared. Whether it be that the human faculties are held to be constitutionally incompetent to such a true knowledge of God and His ways as is presupposed in theology; or that the nature of religion, as lying in sentiment or emotion, is thought to preclude the element of knowledge—otherwise, indeed, than as the poetic vesture in which religious emotions transiently clothe themselves; or that there is lacking in reason or revelation a reliable source from which the desiderated knowledge may be obtained; or that the *data* in Scripture or religious facts on which theology has hitherto been supposed to rest have been rendered insecure or swept away by modern doubt and criticism—the result is the same, that theology has not a trustworthy foundation on which to build, and that, in consequence, it is an illegitimate pretender to the name of science. For it

will be conceded that this last and highest branch of theological discipline proposes nothing less to itself than the systematic exhibition and scientific grounding of what true knowledge we possess of God and His character and His ways of dealing with the world and men; and if no such knowledge really exists,—if what men have is at best vague yearnings, intuitions, aspirations, guesses, imaginings, hypotheses, about God, assuming this name to be itself anything more than a symbol of the dim feeling of the mystery at the root of the universe,—if these emotional states and the conceptions to which they give rise are ever changing with men's changeful fancies and the varying stages of culture,—then it is as vain to attempt to construct a science of theology out of such materials as it would be to weave a solid tissue out of sunbeams, or erect a temple out of the changing shapes and hues of cloudland. A "Science of Religions" might still exist to investigate the psychological laws involved in religious phenomena and their mocking illusions, and "dogmatics" might remain as a study and criticism of the Church's historical creeds; but an independent "Science of Theology," as a body of natural and revealed truth about God, and His purposes and dealings, would no more have any place.

We shall not anticipate Dr. Warfield's able discussion of the objections to Systematic Theology in the succeeding pages by going at any length into the subject here, but would only observe that, divested of irrelevancies, the issue resolves itself ultimately into

the one question of the fact, nature, and verifiableness of the historical Christian revelation. The time is past when men's minds were captivated by the idea of a "Natural Religion" consisting of a few simple articles drawn from, and capable of proof by, reason apart from supernatural revelation—that favourite dream of the Deists and eighteenth-century illuminists; and while the "speculative" theory which would render theology independent of history by resolving its essential doctrines into metaphysical ideas has still its advocates, its sceptre is long broken in the domain of really serious theology. There remains as a source of theological knowledge the positive revealing and redeeming acts and words of God which constitute the subject-matter of historical revelation, though it may be contended that these stand in no antagonism to the conclusions of sound reason reflecting on the structure of the universe, or pondering the deeper questions of origin and destiny, but rather are in truest consonance with the latter, and furnish reason with a light to help it on its way. The chief danger, accordingly, in which theology at present stands arises from the mode in which these historical foundations of revelation are being critically and sceptically assailed,—a process which has already gone to sufficiently extreme lengths with respect to the Old Testament, and is now being applied to subvert faith in such vital facts as the resurrection of our Lord, and the miraculous context of the life of Christ generally, in the New. It is in this part

of the apologetic field, probably, that a new decisive battle will have to be fought in the interests of the possibility of theology ; and it is satisfactory to observe that one result of the critical movement itself has been to impress on many minds the impossibility of eliminating the supernatural factor from the explanation of the history either of Israel or of Christ.

When we read this article of Dr. Warfield's, on its first appearance, some months ago, in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, it seemed to us that a special service would be rendered by its publication and circulation in a separate form, and we heartily rejoice that the same thought has independently occurred to others, and that the idea has now taken shape in this little volume. Apart from its other merits, the article will be found exceedingly informatory as to the tendency and bearings of certain recent interesting movements in Continental theology.





THE RIGHT  
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THE question of the right of such a thing as Systematic Theology to exist may be regarded as a question in general philosophy or as one within the limits of the theological disciplines themselves. If the former alternative be taken, we are confronted at once with such problems as these: Does God exist? May God be known? Have we trustworthy means of learning concerning Him, His nature, His works, His purposes? In other words, all the great questions with which Apologetics busies itself immediately loom before us. Theology is the science of God, and the right of a science of God to exist will depend on a favourable solution of such problems. They are, therefore, in every sense of the words, the fundamental problems with which the theologian has to deal. If we pass them by at present, it is because of no underestimation of their supreme importance. We may fairly be allowed, however, to assume at this point, the existence and

the knowableness of God and the accessibility of credible sources of knowledge of Him—in a word, the possibility and right of a theology, generically so called. This is after all not a very large assumption to make. It amounts only to asking to be permitted to raise a question to be discussed between men professing to be Christians, instead of one in debate between the Christian and non-Christian worlds.

The question, then, that we propose to consider lies within the limits of the theological disciplines. It assumes the right of theology at large, and inquires concerning the right of Systematic Theology in particular. He who says "Systematic Theology" says theological discipline, and calls to mind its correlates in the other theological disciplines. We may not find that the distinction is kept carefully in mind by all who raise objection to the right of Systematic Theology. We shall certainly find, on the contrary, that many of the objections urged against it would, if valid, cut deeper still and destroy Christianity itself. But this is a common incident in debate. And the clear recognition at the outset of the limits of the discussion will conduce to a proper estimate of those forms of objection to Systematic Theology in the mouths of Christian men, which, if really insisted upon, would render Christianity itself nugatory. Such arguments prove so much that for Christian men they prove nothing at all. They are disproved, in other words, by the whole mass of evidence which gives us Christianity.

We are accustomed to regard theology as the queen of the sciences, and Systematic Theology as queen among the theological disciplines. But these are not days in which lofty claims are readily allowed; and we need not be surprised to discover that those which Systematic Theology advances are not permitted to pass unchallenged. It is little that her sister theological disciplines are sometimes found resisting her high pretensions and declaring that they will no longer have her to rule over them: although no more here than elsewhere is the spectacle of conflict between sisters edifying, nor more here than elsewhere is it likely that a family will add much to its strength by becoming divided against itself. Systematic Theology may look on with an amused tolerance and a certain older-sister's pleased recognition of powers just now perhaps a little too conscious of themselves, when the new discipline of Bible Theology, for example, tosses her fine young head and announces of her more settled sister that her day is over. But these words have a more ominous ring in them when the lips that frame them speak no longer as a sister's but as an enemy's, and the meaning injected into them threatens not merely dethronement but destruction. The right of Systematic Theology to reign is not the only thing that is brought into question in these days: its very right to exist is widely challenged. There are few phenomena in the theological world which are more striking indeed than the impatience which is exhibited on every hand with the effort to

define truth and to state with precision the doctrinal presuppositions and contents of Christianity.

The basis of this impatience is often a mere latitudinarian indifferentism, which finds its expression in neglect of formulated truth, and is never weary of girding at what it represents as the hair-splitting ingenuity of theologians and the unprofitableness of theological discussion. But this indifference is at root dislike; and the easy affirmation that doctrines are useless passes very readily into the heated assertion that they are noxious. Now, the contemptuous smile gives way to the flush of anger, and instead of an unconcerned expression of the opinion that theology is a more or less amiable weakness, we have the passionate assertion that theology is killing religion.

A certain relief often comes with the outbreak of open war. Dead indifference is frequently more difficult to deal with than the most lively assault. This is doubtless true in the present case also. It is not hard to show the folly of theological indifferentism: but just because it is indifferent, indifferentism is apt to pay little attention to our exhibition of its folly. If we only could get it to care! But let us reduce it to ever so much absurdity—it calmly goes on in indifference. This indifference to its own refutation by no means extends, however, to its own propagation. It has developed, on the contrary, a most widespread, persistent, and earnest propagandism. We cannot escape its wooing. Turn where we may, we

are met with appeals, suggestions, assaults. The air is full of it. It presides over great religious enterprises; it colours the daily life and thought of social intercourse; it entrenches itself behind philosophical barriers; it finds a voice for itself in the lightest of current literature. It may not be surprising that it is the dominant note among the purveyors to the mere amusement of an idle hour, though the seriousness is worthy of note with which it is commended to us alike in even such novels of contemplation as Lanoe Falconer's *Cecilia de Noël*, and such novels of adventure as Dr. Conan Doyle's *Micah Clark*. It certainly is not surprising that a bright Jewish writer like Mr. Zangwill<sup>1</sup> should include among the sparkling stories which he has gathered into his *King of the Schnorrers* a pathetic appeal to us to recognise that all the differences which divide Jew and Gentile, Romanist and Protestant, fade into nothingness before the spectacle of human suffering and in presence of "the eternal mystery" of death.<sup>2</sup> But we cannot

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Claude G. Montefiori, for example, tells us that modern "Judaism teaches that God looks to character and conduct, and to these only, in His capacity as Judge. The religious dogmas which a man happens to be taught and to believe are of no account or importance in this regard: the good life is all. 'The righteous of all nations shall have a share in the world to come;' that, according to the Jewish divine, is the doctrine of the Talmud and of modern Judaism" (*The Jewish Quarterly Review*, January 1896, p. 202; cf. pp. 210, 211).

<sup>2</sup> The story referred to is that entitled "A Tragi-Comedy of Creeds," p. 176 *sq.* of the volume. It is only another form of the celebrated apologue of the "Three Rings" which Lessing made the core of his *Nathan the Wise*, concerning which it is worth while to consult Cairns' *Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century*, Lecture v. ii. *ad finem*.

miss its significance when, in the midst of the stirrings of soul with which we read of the doings in dear Drumtochty of those men of sturdy hearts whom "Ian Maclaren" has taught us to love, we find it slowly borne in upon us that the main purpose of this evangelical minister is to wring from us the confession that the Christianity approved of Rousseau is good enough for the world.<sup>1</sup> Much of even the professed

<sup>1</sup> Let it not be thought that we do injustice to this delightful and profoundly religious writer. An editorial in *The British Weekly* for October 31, 1895, puts most strikingly just what we conceive the attitude of his stories towards Christianity to be: "A parallel of profound interest is to be found in the place assigned to religion by the older sentimentalists and the new. The position of Ian Maclaren and Mr. Barrie seems to us exactly to coincide with Rousseau's. Rousseau always professed to be religious. He thought there was a certain want of moral depth and grandeur wherever religion was left out, and he would probably have said that this was necessary, for without religion the loftiest reaches of conduct were a form of insanity. At the close of his life Rousseau rejoiced that he had remained faithful to the prejudices of his childhood, and that he had continued a Christian *up to the point of membership in the Universal Church*. The words in italics precisely describe the religion that is glorified in Ian Maclaren's books. He is not unjust to Evangelicalism, and one of his noblest characters is Burnbrae, a Free Church elder. But he lingers with most love and understanding on the Moderates—Drumshough, Dr. Davidson, Dr. Maclure, and James Soutar. Maclure, who has the best means of knowing, declares that if there be a judgment, and books be opened, there will be one for Drumtochty, and the bravest page in it will be Drumshough's. There is very little sympathy here for modernity; the ministers who talk about two Isaiahs are laughed at. But there is just as little sympathy for extreme Evangelicalism. Plymouthism is treated as if it were hypocrisy of the grossest kind, and high Calvinism as almost too monstrous to be mentioned. The particular forms in which the religion of revivals expresses itself are described with evident dislike. All this is, of course, Ian Maclaren's limitation. We should not care to lend him our cherished volumes of the *Earthen Vessel*. Still the heart of things is here. 'Say the NAME,' that is enough—the name of Jesus, in which every knee shall

literature of religion and its reflection on platform and in too many pulpits enforces the same lesson. When we read good Georgie Hesperton's description of the "conference at Honchester," we find ourselves recalling many another conference which it would fit without the need of her finessing. "Of course"—so runs her picture—"there was a tremendous crowd on the day when the Imperial High Commissioner gave his address, and everybody was so delighted with it. I am afraid I do not exactly remember what his subject was, but I know he said it seemed probable that nothing in particular was true, but that people could go on believing whatever they liked, which did just as well. And all the bishops said it was perfectly satisfactory. I hear his address is to be printed as a sort of tract, and no doubt you will read it; it was very earnest and convincing."<sup>1</sup> The whole mass of popular religious literature seems surcharged with attacks on "Intellectualism" and "Dogmatism," and glowing with highly-coloured portraiture of "good Christians" of every name and no name, of every faith and no faith, under each of which stands the

bow. Beyond that nothing is needed to create the noblest character. Mr. Barrie does not glorify Moderatism, but, like Ian Maclaren, he declines a dogmatic religion, and is gently apologetic or humorous when speaking of what goes beyond the essence. Therein he differs from George Macdonald, whose books are full of *theologoumena*, and have suffered in consequence. But they side with Rousseau, who was wont to insist that the Christianity which appeals only to the moral conscience is alone conformable to the Spirit of Christ. Conduct, character—these were with him and are with them the great results and tests of true religion."

<sup>1</sup> Jane Barlow's *Maureen's Fairing*, p. 148.

legend written that since good Christians arise under every form of faith or no faith alike, it cannot be of much importance what men believe. "Let others wrangle over this or that," is the common cry—"it is all of no consequence: let us leave them to their disputes and for ourselves be Christians." The late Professor John Stuart Blackie's lines quite embody the sentiment of the hour—

"Creeds and confessions? High Church or the Low?  
 I cannot say; but you would vastly please us  
 If with some pointed Scripture you could show  
 To which of these belonged the Saviour, Jesus.  
 I think to all or none. Not curious creeds  
 Or ordered forms of churchly rule He taught,  
 But soul of love that blossomed into deeds,  
 With human good and human blessing fraught.  
 On me nor priest nor presbyter nor pope,  
 Bishop nor dean, may stamp a party name;  
 But Jesus with His largely human scope  
 The service of my human life may claim.  
 Let prideful priests do battle about creeds,  
 The church is mine that does most Christ-like deeds."

The inconsequence of this reasoning is, of course, colossal, and the line of thought that is thus lightly adopted, when pushed to its legitimate conclusion, would obviously banish Christianity from the earth. For if doctrine be of no value, because some, who theoretically deny or neglect it, nevertheless exhibit the traits of a good life, what truth will remain to which we can attach importance? It would not be difficult to discover good men who deny severally every doctrine of even the most attenuated Christianity; and we should soon find ourselves forced



to allow that not only those doctrines which divide Christian sects, but those also which constitute the very elements of Christianity, are of no real moment. But let us ask a brilliant young French theologian to make this clear to us. Says M. Henri Bois :<sup>1</sup>—

“ Doctrine is of little importance, what is of importance is life, we are told. But, it being admitted that life is the essential thing—a matter which is as incontestable as it is uncontested, and which, when it is admitted, saves us from Intellectualism in the only censurable sense of the word—the question is precisely whether certain doctrines are not necessary for the production and maintenance of a certain life. Doctrines are not life ! Assuredly not. No one ever said they were. But does it follow from that that they are not indispensable to life ? Doctrines are not the cause of life ! On that we are agreed. Does it follow from that that they are not one of the conditions of life ?

“ Here recourse is had to a notable argument. Such and such a great Christian is adduced who does not profess some doctrines which we profess. And at once the consequence is drawn to the uselessness of these doctrines. You see this scholar, as pious as he is learned : he rejects these doctrines, and that does not prevent him from being pious. Therefore these doctrines serve no purpose—or else, you must refuse to see a Christian in your brother, you must anathematise him, condemn him.

“ It will be wise to observe whither this argument leads. Apply it well, and it will not be easy to discover what it will leave subsisting : for, after all, who of us does not know rationalists who lead a life as moral and spiritual as some evangelicals—sometimes more so ? Therefore, since it is conduct, life, sentiment, which is of supreme importance, there is no need to be evangelical. More than that, who of us does not know free-thinkers, unbelievers, superior in morality at least, if we hesitate to say in spirituality, to such and such Christians ? Therefore, there is no need to be a Christian.

“ ‘ Well, yes,’ our honourable opponents will reply, ‘ there is no need to be a Christian, in the sense you mean ; there is no need to be evangelical in the sense you mean—that is, in the doctrinal sense.

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Dogme Grec* (Paris, 1893), pp. 40–42. We shall have occasion during the course of this paper to draw very largely from two admirable books by Prof. Henri Bois—his *Le Dogme Grec* and his *De la Connaissance Religieuse*. Let us express here our appreciation of the value of these works as well as our indebtedness to them.

True religion is life.'—And then, if you press them, they will tell you with a fine air that they know perfectly what they mean by 'life,' however little you may believe it. Well, tell us, then, what it is, if you know it, we reply; communicate your happy knowledge to us!—But take good care! If you open your mouth you will become at once Intellectualists—Intellectualists on your own account!

“This exaggerated aversion to Intellectualism leads logically to rendering incapable of transmission and to isolating in the silence of the individual consciousness, a life which doctrines alone have rendered possible, and which without them would not exist.”

In one word, the whole latitudinarian position is built up upon the fancy that the product of the religious sentiment is Christianity; and it is destined to a rude awakening whenever it discovers that religious sentiment is the natural possession of man, and performs its appropriate work in every atmosphere, and under the tutelage of every faith. The fetish-worshipper, no less than the vested priest serving at some gorgeous altar at Rome or Moscow, possesses his religious nature, and may through it attain a high degree of religious development. If, then, we take the ground that nothing is needed but a deep religious sentiment and its fruits, we have cut up Christianity, in any intelligible sense, by the roots. So poor Francis W. Newman found when in his half-taught zeal he stood before the Moslem carpenter at Aleppo,<sup>1</sup> and his heart

<sup>1</sup> The striking scene is described in *Phases of Faith* (London, 1870), p. 32. The reader of Mr. James Macdonald's *Religion and Myth* (London, 1893) will feel that Mr. Macdonald has gone through some such experience, in a less acute form, as Mr. Newman's. He, too, has discovered that even the lowest savages have a religious consciousness, and exercise religious faith and enjoy religious certitude, and is led by it to a theory of the origin of Christianity which amounts to pure naturalism. Cf. J. Macbride Sterrett's *Reason and Authority in Religion* for some good remarks on this point.

was forced to recognise in him a man of deeper religious nature and of higher religious attainments than he himself possessed—he who had come to teach to him and such as him the “true religion.” With the premises which had taken possession of his mind, what could he do but what he did—give distinctive Christianity up? What, after all, is peculiar to Christianity is not the religious sentiment and its working, but its message of salvation—in a word, its doctrine. To be indifferent to doctrine is thus but another way of saying we are indifferent to Christianity.

It is, of course, easy to say that in reasoning thus we have pressed the latitudinarian idea to an unwarrantable extreme. It is quite possible to look with indifference upon doctrinal differences within the limits of essential Christianity, without thinking of no consequence those great fundamental truths which constitute essential Christianity. But the answer is equally easy. To refuse to follow the latitudinarian idea to this extreme is to abandon altogether the principle of the uselessness, the indifference of doctrines. If there be some doctrines to which, as Christian men, we cannot be indifferent, then it is no longer true that doctrines as such are matters of indifference. There may be some doctrines which we esteem as less important than others, or even as of no importance in the framing of a specifically Christian life; but so long as there remain others, the maintenance of which we esteem essential

to the very existence of Christianity, our attitude towards doctrine as such cannot be that of amused contempt. The very centre of the debate is now shifted. And so little can doctrine be neglected on this new ground, that a serious attempt becomes at once imperative to distinguish between essential and unessential doctrines. Men may conceivably differ as to the exact point at which the line of discrimination between these classes should be drawn. But the very attempt to draw it implies that there are doctrines which are useful, important, necessary. And the admission of this yields the whole point in debate. If there be any doctrines, however few, which justly deserve the name of essential doctrines, and stand at the root of the Christian life as its conditions, foundations, or presuppositions, it surely becomes the duty as well as the right of the Christian man to study them, to seek to understand them in themselves and in their relations, to attempt to state them with accuracy and to adjust their statement to the whole body of known truth—in a word, the right and function of Systematic Theology is vindicated.

The extent of this Systematic Theology may remain an open question ; but a content is already vindicated for it, and a place and function among the necessary theological disciplines, so soon as the conception of "essential doctrines," however limited, once emerges into thought. He who goes only so far, in a word, becomes at once an "Intellectualist" in the only sense in which the Systematic Theologian is an Intel-

lectualist—that is, he recognises that Christianity is truth as well as life, and as such addresses itself to the intelligence of men, and has claims upon their belief as well as upon their obedience. He becomes at once a “Dogmatist” in the only sense in which the Systematic Theologian is a Dogmatist—that is, he recognises the objective validity of a body of religious truth and its imperative claims upon all for acceptance, and is therefore prepared to press this truth upon the attention of all alike as the condition of their religious life. In fine, he who only goes so far becomes in spite of himself, himself a Systematic Theologian: and once having come to look upon any doctrines as “essential,” and to attempt to set them forth in an orderly manner, he will hardly fail gradually to enlarge the circle of truths which he will admit to his systematic treatment. Let us say that only the “essential” doctrines are to be included: but surely, in a systematic treatment of these, we cannot exclude the statement and development of those other truths which, while not “essential” in and of themselves, are yet necessary to the integrity and stability of these “essential” doctrines, and so are, in a secondary and derived sense, themselves “essential.” And so on in the tertiary and quaternary rank. Thus the body of doctrine will grow until it will be hard if we do not find ourselves at last in possession of a pretty complete Systematic Theology.

It would seem, then, that a mere doctrinal indifferentism cannot sustain itself as over against the

claims of Systematic Theology. If the right of theology to exist is to be denied, it must be on some more positive ground than that which merely affirms that doctrines lack all significance. It is only when the widely diffused dislike of doctrines takes the more directly polemic form of declaring them not merely useless but actively noxious, that the real controversy begins. And of late this stronger assertion has become exceedingly common. Christ, we are told, did not come to teach a doctrine or to institute a hierarchy; He came to found a religion. To His simple followers, to whose pious hearts His holy living communicated a deep religious impulse, the elaborate ecclesiastical machinery of Rome was no more foreign than the equally elaborate theological constructions of the dogmatists. In their toils faith is imprisoned, straitened, petrified: if it is ever to regain its freedom and flexibility, its primitive fecundity and power of reproduction, it must be stripped of all the artificial envelopes in which it has been swathed by the perverse ingenuity of men, and permitted once more to work on men in its naked simplicity, as faith and not dogma. Theology is killing religion, we are told; and the hope of the future rests on our killing theology first that religion may live.

There are naturally many forms taken by this somewhat violent hostility to doctrine — or to “dogma,” as its opponents like to call it — and many grounds on which it seeks to support itself.

No doubt it is often only the expression of an innate antipathy to clear thinking and of a not very rare incapacity for truth—a sort of colour-blindness to truth. The late Mr. James Anthony Froude, for example, suffering from what Mr. Andrew Lang speaks of as his “lamented and constitutional inaccuracy,”<sup>1</sup> exhibited a similar antipathy to formulated truth in the spheres in which he dealt. “Truth itself,” he wrote, “becomes distasteful to me when it comes in the shape of a proposition. Half the life is struck out of it in the process.”<sup>2</sup> How much more trustworthy he would have been as a historian if he could only have had more taste for exact fact! There are many theologians to whom truth in propositional form is in like manner distasteful, and half, or all, its life seems dissipated, for the same reason—because they too are afflicted with a lamentable and constitutional inaccuracy. No wonder that upon such minds exact statement seems to act like an irritant, and theology appears to be an enemy of religion. Men like these must be classified as deficient; and

<sup>1</sup> “In Mr. Froude’s wine there were no dregs. To the last he had the same captivating power, despite his lamented and constitutional inaccuracy” (Andrew Lang, *The Cosmopolitan* (magazine), September 1895, p. 576).

<sup>2</sup> “The *Fortnightly Review*, about which you ask, is an advanced radical publication. Many good men write in it. But it is too doctrinaire for my taste. The formulas of advanced English politicians are as stiff and arrogant as the formulas of theology. Truth itself becomes distasteful to me when it comes in the shape of a proposition. Half the life is struck out of it in the process” (J. A. Froude, letter to Gen. Cluseret, in *The Independent*, August 8, 1895).

we can no more yield the right of theology in obedience to their outcries than the physicist can consent to refuse all discussion of colour to please the colour-blind, or the musician all study of harmony lest he should bore those who have no ear for music. Men who have no faculty for truth will always consider an appeal to truth an evil. But the assault upon doctrinal Christianity is far from being confined to those whom we must believe to possess reason, indeed, for they too are men, but who seem very chary of using it. On the contrary, it is being carried on to-day by the very leaders of Christian thought—by men whose shining intellectual gifts are equalled only by their trained dialectical skill and the profundity of their theological learning. “Theology is killing religion” is not merely the wail of those who are incapable of theology and would nevertheless fain preserve their religion. It is the reasoned assertion of masters of theological science whose professed object is to preserve Christianity in its purity and save it from the dangers which encompass it in this weak and erring world. It is a position, therefore, which deserves our most respectful consideration, and if we still feel bound to refuse it, we owe it to ourselves to give a reason for the faith that is in us.

There are two chief points of view from which the right of doctrinal Christianity is denied by leading theologians of our day. The watchword of one of these schools of thought is that Christianity consists of facts, not dogmas: that of the other is that Chris-



tianity consists of life, not doctrine. Let us see in turn what is meant by these phrases and what is to be said with reference to the modes of conceiving Christianity which they represent.

Christianity, then, we are told, consists of facts, not of dogmas. What we rest upon for our salvation is not a body of theories, intellectual constructions, speculative ideas, but a series of mighty acts of God, by which He has entered into the course of human history and wrought powerfully for the salvation of our lost race. Thus, He chose for Himself a people in Abraham and gradually moulded them into a matrix in which salvation might be prepared for all the world; and when the fulness of time had come, He descended into their midst in the person of His Son, was born of a woman, lived and suffered and died for our salvation, and having died for our sins, rose again for our justification, and now ever lives to make intercession for us. This—this mighty series of divine acts—this is Christianity: by the side of these facts all human theories are only so many impertinences. It is not by any theory of the person of Christ that we are saved—it is by the great fact of the incarnation: it is not by any theory of the atonement that we are saved—it is by the great fact of Christ's death for us; it is not by any theory of His heavenly high-priesthood that we are saved, but by the great fact that He sits at the right hand of the Majesty on High and reigns over all things for His Church. Let us, then, renounce all our wire-drawn theories and

take our stand once for all upon these great facts which really constitute Christianity. Christianity consists of these facts, not of dogmas: and it is the sole business of the theologian to establish these facts, not to invent dogmas.<sup>1</sup> In this, moreover, he will be imitating the writers of Scripture: for "the Bible simply recounts the facts without pretending to the least shadow of authority."<sup>2</sup>

The truth that underlies these representations is very obvious; and we cannot wonder that they have exercised an influence far beyond the limits of the class of thinkers whose watchword they are intended to justify. Accordingly nothing has become more common of late than an appeal from the doctrines of Christianity to its facts. All revelation is reduced to the patefaction of God in the series of His great redemptive acts, to the exclusion—entire or partial—of revelation by word, which is sometimes represented, indeed, as in the nature of the case impossible. Churches are exhorted to lay aside their "theological" creeds and adopt "religious" ones—that is, creeds which consist in the mere enumeration of the great facts which lie at the basis of Christianity, the advocates of this procedure usually having something like the Apostles' Creed in mind. In still broader

<sup>1</sup> "La théologie doit peut-être se borner à constater des faits" (Stapfer, *Jésus de Nazareth et le développement de sa pensée sur lui-même*, p. 156; quoted by H. Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 225).

<sup>2</sup> "La Bible raconte simplement les faits, sans prétendre à la moindre ombre d'autorité" (Astié, in *Évangile et Liberté*, Dec. 26, 1890; quoted by H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 342).

circles, it has become very customary to distinguish between what is called the fact and the theory when dealing with special doctrines, and to profess belief in the fact of sin, of the incarnation, of the atonement, and the like, while despairing of discovering any tenable explanation of them. A recent example of this now fashionable mode of dealing with fundamental elements of Christianity may be found in the essay on the Atonement which was contributed to the volume called *Faith and Criticism*, by Dr. R. F. Horton, of London—a brilliant preacher, who, however, must not be taken too seriously as a theologian.<sup>1</sup> Such a mental attitude, as Dr. James Denney points out,<sup>2</sup> in a striking passage in the lectures which he

<sup>1</sup> *Faith and Criticism*. Essays by Congregationalists. New York : E. P. Dutton, 1893. V. The Atonement, pp. 188, 222, 237: "It is the object of the present essay to advocate this sobriety of assertion in dealing with the question of the atonement. It may be a duty on the one hand to maintain that the death of Christ is the means by which sin is pardoned and reconciliation between God and man effected; and yet, on the other, to own that no real explanation of it can be found." "*The New Testament has no theory about the atonement* . . . nor is the case fully stated when we deny that the New Testament contains a theory; there is a strong reason for suspecting that the several New Testament writers . . . differed," etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Theology*, p. 106: "In spite, too, of confident assertions to the contrary," he adds, "this distinction of fact and theory—is this pleading for the fact as opposed to the theory—is very far from finding support in the New Testament. For my own part, I have no doubt the New Testament does contain a theory, or, as I should prefer to say, a doctrine of the atonement," etc. One may suspect that Dr. Denney had precisely Mr. Horton's essay in mind in penning this portion of his discussion; certainly he traverses with very great convincingness the contentions and illustrations alike put forward by Dr. Horton. The statement in the late Dr. Henry B. Smith's *System of Christian Theology*, p. 460, may well be compared. "When we say

recently delivered before the students of the Chicago Theological Seminary, is certainly not easy to understand, and cannot possibly be final: but it is an attitude in which not only do many acquiesce to-day, but some even seem to glory. Dr. John Watson, for example, in a delightful "little book on religion," in which, like Mr. Horton, he emphasises the importance of Christ's death for salvation, yet seems to take considerable pride and to find great comfort in the idea that it is entirely inexplicable how His death could make for salvation. "Had one questioned the little band that evening,"—the evening of the last supper,—he says in his customarily striking way, "how Christ's death would be of any good unto them or the world, then it is probable that St. John himself had been silent. Much has been written since by devout scholars, and some of their words have helped and some have hindered, and the reason of the great mystery of sacrifice has not yet been declared. . . . There is one modern crucifixion which is perfectly satisfying because it leaves everything beyond Jesus and the soul to the imagination. It is a space of black darkness, with some dim strokes of light, and as you try to pierce the gloom they suggest the form of a crucified Man. The face is faintly visible and a ray from the forehead striking downwards reveals a kneeling—

that the death of Christ was instead of our punishment, and that it made expiation for our sins, we are not stating theories but revealed facts. . . . We do not suppose that anything which can properly be called a theory is involved in any one of the points that we have presented in respect to the doctrine of sacrifices."

ing figure at the foot of the cross. Within the secret place of this mystery the human soul and Jesus meet and become one.”<sup>1</sup> Is it, then, indeed true that Christianity loves darkness more than light, and thrives best where it is least understood?

If, indeed, it were necessary to distinguish, as sharply as this theory bids us, between the doctrines and facts of Christianity, there is none who would not find the essence of Christianity in the facts. The fact of the incarnation, the atonement, the heavenly high-priesthood—here undoubtedly is the centre of Christianity, about which its doctrines revolve. And if it were possible not merely to distinguish between them, but to separate the doctrines from the facts, then of course it would be to the facts alone that we could flee. We may cherish doubts as to the value of facts without their interpreting doctrines, but we cannot but be sure that doctrines to which no facts correspond can be nothing other than myths—let us say it frankly, lies. It is to the force of this suggestion that the representations under discussion owe their influence. But the antithesis thus drawn is a wholly false one. No one would contend that Christianity consists in doctrines as distinguished from

<sup>1</sup> *The Upper Room*. London, 1895, p. 75. “A mystic,” says Dr. Watson, admirably (p. 60), “gathers truth as a plant absorbs the light, in silence and without effort.” It is certainly easy enough to refuse to make the requisite effort to obtain the truth: and were it only indubitable that thus the truth would be absorbed, the pathway to knowledge would be royal indeed. It seems to be the characteristic of our modern mystics, however, to stop short of obtaining the truth and to proclaim it to be unnecessary, if indeed not positively undesirable.

facts, far less that it consists in doctrines wholly unrelated to facts. But neither ought anyone contend that it consists in facts as distinguished from doctrines, and far less that it consists in facts as separated from doctrines. What Christianity consists in is facts that are doctrines, and doctrines that are facts. Just because it is a true religion, which offers to man a real redemption that was really wrought out in history, its facts and doctrines entirely coalesce. All its facts are doctrines and all its doctrines are facts. The incarnation is a doctrine: no eye saw the Son of God descend from heaven and enter the virgin's womb: but if it be not a true fact as well, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins. The resurrection of Christ is a fact: an occurrence in time level to the apprehension of men and witnessed by their adequate testimony: but it is at the same time the cardinal doctrine of Christianity. Dr. James Orr, in his noble Kerr Lectures, brings out the truth here in a most satisfactory manner.<sup>1</sup> He says:—

“Christianity, it will be here said, is a *fact-revelation*—it has its centre in a living Christ and not in a dogmatic creed. And this in a sense is true. . . . The gospel is no mere proclamation of ‘eternal truths,’ but the discovery of a saving purpose of God for mankind, executed in time. But the doctrines are the interpretation of the facts. The facts do not stand blank and dumb before us, but have a voice given to them and a meaning put into them. They are accompanied by living speech, which makes their meaning clear. When John declares that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh and is the Son of God, he is stating a fact, but he is none the less enunciating a doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. James Orr's *The Christian View of God and the World*, p. 25.

When Paul affirms, 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' he is proclaiming a fact, but he is at the same time giving an interpretation of it."

It will be of use to us to consider for a moment the effect of the sharp antithesis which is drawn in the declaration that Christianity does not consist in dogmas, but in facts. What is a fact that is wholly separated from what is here called "dogma"? If doctrines which stand entirely out of relation to facts are myths, lies, facts which have no connection with what we call doctrine could have no meaning to us whatsoever. It is what we call doctrine which gives all their significance to facts. A fact without doctrine is simply a fact not understood. That intellectual element brought by the mind to the contemplation of facts, which we call "doctrine," "theory," is the condition of any proper comprehension of facts. It constitutes the elements of what the Herbartians call "apperception," and by means of it alone is a fact capable of passing into our minds as a force and in any measure influencing our thought and life. And therefore Dr. James Denney, in the passage to which we have already had occasion to allude,—where he is expressing his surprise that anyone should seem to glory and triumph in inability to discover the theory of a fact fundamental to Christianity—adds with the most complete justice:<sup>1</sup>—

"A fact of which there is absolutely no theory is a fact which stands out of relation to everything in the universe, a fact which has no con-

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<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Theology*, p. 106. Cf. the remark of Coleridge, in *Anima Poetæ*, p. 125: "'Facts—stubborn facts! None of your theory!' A most entertaining and instructive essay might be written on this text, and the sooner the better. Trace it from the most

nection with any part of our experience ; it is a blank unintelligibility, a rock in the sky, a mere irrelevance in the mind of man. There is no such thing conceivable as a fact of which there is no theory, or even a fact of which *we* have no theory ; such a thing could not enter *our* world at all ; if there could be such a thing, it would be so far from having the virtue in it to redeem us from sin that it would have no interest for us and no effect upon us at all."

So closely welded are those intellectual elements—those elements of previous knowledge, or of knowledge derived from other sources—to facts as taken up into our minds in the complex act of apperception, that possibly we have ordinarily failed to separate them, and consequently, in our worship of what we call so fluently "the naked facts," have very little considered what a bare fact is, and what little meaning it could have for us. M. Naville has sought to illustrate the matter by an incident from his own experience. Even, he says<sup>1</sup>—

absurd credulity—*e.g.* in Fracastorius' *De Sympathiâ*, cap. i., and the Alchemy Book—even to that of your modern agriculturists, relating their own facts and swearing against each other like ships' crews. Oh ! it is the relations of the facts—not the facts, friend !" From the point of view of the historian, Professor Woodrow Wilson (*The Century Magazine*, September 1895, pp. 787, 788) speaks to somewhat the same effect : " 'Give us the facts, and nothing but the facts,' is the sharp injunction of our age to its historians. Upon the face of it, an eminently reasonable requirement. To tell the truth, simply, openly, without reservation, is the unimpeachable first principle of all right living ; and historians have no licence to be quit of it. Unquestionably they must tell us the truth." . . . But "an interesting circumstance thus comes to light. It is nothing less than this, that the facts do not of themselves constitute the truth. The truth is abstract, not concrete. It is the just idea, the right revelation of what things mean. It is evoked only by such arrangements and orderings of facts as suggest meanings."

<sup>1</sup> *Le témoignage du Christ et l'unité du monde Chrétien*, pp. 293, 294 : quoted by H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 343.



“The things which we ourselves see have their meaning and their import only through the adjunction of *ideas* taken upon testimony. One day, at Paris, I saw on the quay which runs alongside the Tuileries, the Emperor Napoleon III. pass by in a cabriolet which he himself was driving. Here is a fact which I verified for myself. But let us reduce this fact to the elements of personal perception, separated from the *ideas* which came from another source. I saw a large building: how did I know that this building bore the name of the Tuileries, and that it was the residence of the sovereign of France? By the testimony of others. I saw a man pass: how did I know that this man was called Napoleon III. and that he was the Emperor of the French. By testimony. If I reduce the fact to the data of my personal perceptions, here is what is left: I saw, near a large building, a man who drove a cabriolet—nothing more. The facts that pass under our eyes have their meaning and value only by the intervention of *ideas* which we owe to the affirmations of our fellows.”

If, then, we are to affirm that Christianity consists of facts, wholly separated from those ideas by which these facts obtain their significance and meaning and which it pleases us to call “dogmas”—what shall we do but destroy all that we know as Christianity altogether? The great facts that constitute Christianity are just as “naked” as any other facts, and are just as meaningless to us as any other facts, until they are not only perceived but understood, *i.e.* until not only they themselves but their doctrinal significance is made known to us. The whole Christianity of these facts resides in their meaning, in the ideas which are involved in them, but which are not independently gathered from them by each observer, but are attributed to them by those who interpret them to us—in a word, in the doctrines accompanying them. For what are the great facts that constitute Christianity? Strip them free from “dogma,” from that interpreta-

tion which has transformed them into doctrine, and what have we left at the most but this: that once upon a time a man was born, who lived in poverty and charity, died on the cross and rose again. An interesting series of facts, no doubt, with elements of mystery in them, of the marvellous, of the touching; but hardly in their naked form constituting what we call Christianity. For that they require to receive their interpretation. This man was the Son of God, we are told; He came in the flesh to save sinners; He gave Himself to death as a propitiation for their sins; and He rose again for their justification. Now, indeed, we have Christianity. But it is not constituted by the "bare facts," but by the facts as interpreted, and indeed by the facts as thus interpreted, and not otherwise. Give the facts no interpretation, and we cannot find in them what we can call Christianity; give them a different interpretation, and we shall have something other than Christianity. Christianity is constituted, therefore, not by the facts, but by the "dogmas"—*i.e.* by the facts as understood in one specific manner. Surely it is of importance, therefore, to the Christian man to investigate this one Christian interpretation of the great facts that constitute Christianity: and this is the task of Systematic Theology.

We must not fail to emphasise that the conclusion at which we have thus arrived implies that there lies at the basis of Christianity not only a series of great redemptive facts, but also an authoritative interpreta-

tion of those facts. Amid the perhaps many interpretations possible to this series of facts, who will help us to that one through which alone they can constitute Christianity? In the ordinary affairs of life we are enabled to arrive at the true interpretation of the facts that meet us, by the explanations of those who have knowledge of their meaning and who have a claim upon our belief when they explain them to us. For example, in the instance cited from M. Naville, he could be assured that the man he saw driving the cabriolet was Napoleon III. by anyone whose knowledge of the Emperor he could trust. These great facts of Christianity—is there anyone who has knowledge of their meaning and who has a right to our belief when he explains them to us? who, in a word, has authority to declare to the world what this series of great facts means, or in other words, what Christianity is? It is evident that we are face to face here with an anxious question. And it means nothing less than this, that the existence of a doctrinal authority is fundamental to the very existence of Christianity. We find that doctrinal authority ultimately, of course, in Christ. In Him we discern one in whose knowledge of the meaning of the great series of Christian facts in which He was chief actor, we can have supreme confidence; and to whom, with the apostles whom He appointed to teach all nations, we may safely go for the interpretation of the Christian facts. In the teachings of Christ and His apostles, therefore, we find authoritative Christian doctrine—

“dogma” in the strictest sense of the word: and this “dogma” enters into the very essence of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

But we are told, as may perhaps be remembered, that the Bible does not contain “dogmas.” M. Astié, for example, has allowed himself to affirm, in a passage already quoted, that “the Bible simply recounts the facts without pretending to the least shadow of authority.” It is a question of fact; and every Bible reader may be trusted to resolve it for himself.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the Bible does not give us a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Henri Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, pp. 110–117: “Christianity is, therefore, without being this exclusively, a combination of facts and ideas. . . . The fact does not suffice. The fact by itself is nothing, serves no purpose. That it should avail anything, there is needed the interpretation of the fact, the idea. . . . Who will tell us in what the true interpretation of the Christian fact consists? . . . Jesus Christ Himself and those whom He Himself chose, prepared and inspired to make Him known to the world. . . . The mission of the apostles was to recount and interpret the Christian facts to the world. . . . If God wrought certain definite acts for the whole of humanity together, it seems to us altogether natural that He should have given also, in a definite fashion, by His Son, Jesus Christ, Author of these acts, and by the apostles, witnesses of these acts, formed in the school of Christ and penetrated by His Spirit, an interpretation of these acts, valid for all humanity. God acted once for all, in a definite fashion: but the first essential sense of this act does not change, since the act itself, the past act, remains accomplished, immutable. There are therefore definitive ideas by the side of definitive facts. . . . We affirm, therefore, that the writings of the witnesses of the Christian facts, their accounts and their interpretations, have authority.”

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Henry Wace, in his Bampton Lectures on *The Foundations of Faith* (p. 121), neatly exhibits the nature of the frequent assertion that the Bible contains no “dogmas” in a characteristic incident or two. “It is the favourite contention of those who impugn the faith of the Church,” he says, “that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is purely moral and independent of theology. ‘It is undeniable,’

bare list of "naked facts"; but a rich account and development of significant facts held in a special meaning—of facts understood and interpreted. With the interpretation of these facts, rather than with their mere record, a large part of the Bible is solely employed, as, for example, the epistles of Paul: and

says the author of *Supernatural Religion*, with characteristic strength of assertion, 'that the earliest teaching of Jesus recorded in the gospel which can be regarded as in any degree historical is pure morality, almost, if not quite, free from theological dogmas. Morality was the essence of His system; theology was an afterthought.' Two pages later this writer states with perfect correctness, but with complete unconsciousness of inconsistency, that Christ's system 'confined itself to two fundamental principles, love to God and love to man.' But is there no theology involved in teaching love to God? No theology in the belief that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and that in spite of all the difficulties, perplexities, and cruelties of the world, He is worthy of the whole love and trust of our hearts! Why, this is the very theological problem which has racked the heart and brain of man from the dawn of religious thought to the present moment. On these two commandments—to which, in the curious phrase just quoted, Christ's system is said to have 'confined itself,' as though they were slight or simple—on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. They are the germ from which has sprung the whole theological thought of the Christian Church, and to which it returns; and no theologian can wish to do more than to deepen his own apprehension of them and to strengthen their hold upon others. With similar inconsistency, M. Rénan declares that 'we should seek in vain for a theological proposition in the gospel,' and yet states elsewhere that 'a lofty notion of the Divinity was in some sort the germ of our Lord's whole being.' 'God,' he adds, 'is in Him; He feels Himself in communion with God; and He draws from His heart that which he speaks of His Father.' These are strange inconsistencies. But there is nothing, perhaps, more fitted to warn a thoughtful mind, at the threshold of sceptical speculations, of their essential shallowness, than the manner in which the vastest conceptions and the profoundest problems are thus passed over, as it were, dryshod by such writers as have just been quoted." The fine passage on pp. 194–198 on the influence of doctrine on life should also be read.

even when the immediate object is the record of the facts themselves, they are not set down nakedly, but in a distinct doctrinal context. Dr. James Denney is thoroughly justified in his rebuke to expositors who would neglect this context:<sup>1</sup>—

“A mere exegete is sometimes tempted,” he says, “to read New Testament sentences as if they had no context but that which stands before him in black and white; they had from the very beginning, and have still, another context in the minds of Christian readers which it is impossible to disregard. They are not addressed to minds in the condition of a *tabula rasa*; if they were, they could hardly be understood at all; they were addressed to minds that had been delivered—as Paul says to the Romans: a church, remember, to which he was personally a stranger—to a type or mould of teaching; such minds have in this a criterion and a clew to the intention of a Christian writer; they can take a hint, and read into brief words the fullness of Christian truth. I have no doubt that it was in this way such expressions were interpreted as we find all through the New Testament: ‘Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many’; ‘He loosed us from our sins by His blood’; ‘Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world’; ‘He is the propitiation for our sins.’ To say that words like these express a fact but not a theory—a fact as opposed to a theory—is to say they mean nothing whatever. A member of the apostolic Church would be conscious of their meaning without any conscious effort; what they suggested to him would be precisely that truth which is so distasteful to many of those who plead for the fact as against ‘theory,’ that in Christ’s death our condemnation was endured by Him. This theory *is* the fact; there is nothing else in these various expressions either to accept or to contest.”

If there be any justice in these remarks at all—and surely their justice lies on their face—it would be truer to say of the Bible that it contains nothing but “dogmas,” than to say that it contains only “facts”

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Theology*, pp. 119, 120. Cf. the wise remarks of Dr. Cairns, *à propos* of Semler, in his *Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century*, Lecture v. ii., near the beginning.

and no "dogmas": all the facts given to us by Scripture are given as "dogmas," that is, as facts that have a specific meaning for our souls. Doubtless part of the extremity of such deliverances as M. Asti's is due to a failure on the part of their authors to strip the Christian facts bare enough. It is the fact as interpreted and not the naked fact itself that they call the fact. But it will scarcely do to prove that Christianity consists in facts to the exclusion of "dogmas," by calling all the dogmas which enter into the essence of Christianity facts. No doubt they are facts, but not in the sense intended by these writers; and thus the whole centre of the debate would be shifted. The contention would no longer be that no "dogmas" enter into the essence of Christianity, but merely that only such "dogmas" enter into the essence of Christianity as are rooted in fact, to the exclusion of such as have no basis in fact—in other words, of myths and lies. This no one will dispute. But it does not avail to show that Christianity consists of facts and not dogmas, but only that the dogmas which enter into Christianity are true.

The antipathy to external authority in religion is much too deeply rooted, however, to die with the mere exhibition of the necessity of interpretation to render facts of any import or value to man. There are some to whom it will still seem that the necessity of interpretation may be allowed, and yet the existence of an external doctrinal authority be denied.

M. Rivier may be taken as an example of this type of thought. "Certainly," he says<sup>1</sup>—

"Certainly to verify a historical fact is far from comprehending its religious and supernatural sense. An event whose significance remains foreign to us cannot have the least direct importance for our salvation, even though it may be ineffably rich in divine lessons and in religious motives. In order that we may know God, it evidently is not sufficient that he should act, it is necessary further that He should speak."

So far, everything runs along satisfactorily: it is just the contention we have been making. But M. Rivier proceeds at once to take the significance out of his admission. "Only," he continues, and the word "only" is ominous—

"Only it is necessary that he should speak to *us*. For we could never recognise His activity in a historical fact unless its explication made us personally verify a divine element in it. Now this interpretation God commonly gave, according to the biblical narratives, to the witnesses of the events. Whilst we, in order to understand these facts, are to be reduced to the more or less exact report of their authentic interpretation!"

"Therefore," comments M. Henry Bois, with his inimitable point<sup>2</sup>—

"Therefore, in what the Bible and history transmit to us, there is nothing but the raw facts for us to take into consideration. The rest is of no value: it is of little consequence to us what God has said to others; that alone is of consequence to us which has been said to *us*. . . . Nevertheless, it is allowed that the facts without ideas are of no value for salvation. . . . Consequently what history and the Bible transmit to us has no value for salvation: value resides principally, fundamentally, in what God says to us, at present, in our revelations,

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<sup>1</sup> *Étude sur la révélation chrétienne*, p. 44; quoted in H. Bois' *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 114 *sq.*



in our illuminations, in our fantasies, in our dreams. For having wished to discard the apostolic explications of the historic fact, we find ourselves quite naturally brought to discarding the historical fact itself.

“And, indeed, we shall ask M. Rivier: Why this different mode of treating the fact and the idea? ‘In order that we may know God, it evidently is not sufficient that He should act: it is necessary further that He should speak. Only it is necessary that He should speak to *us*.’ So far so good. But why not say also: ‘Only it is necessary that He should act for *us*, by *us*, and in *us*’? It is of no use to make God speak historically? Be it so. But why make Him act historically? Are we to be reduced to the more or less exact and more or less authentic reports of the facts of which certain men were witnesses many centuries ago? No, it is necessary that God should act for *us* and in *us*. The apostolic interpretation of the Christian facts is given us by tradition, that fatal tradition, that nightmare of so-called independent minds? It is true. But by what, then, if you please, are you furnished with the facts, if not by this same tradition? You declare that tradition reporting ideas needs later commentaries, and you exclaim, ‘Is the latest commentary too clothed with a divine authority?’ We should like you to tell us if tradition reporting facts has no need of criticism: will criticism, perchance, then be clothed with a divine authority?

“In short, he who says fact, history, says at the same time witness, tradition, authority. The more authority, the more tradition—the more fact.”

We could scarcely have a neater or completer refutation by the method of reduction to absurdity. The pity is that everybody does not see that the reduction is to absurdity. For the absurd position to which M. Bois would thus drive M. Rivier, that very position is voluntarily assumed by others. Would M. Bois show that by parity of reasoning with that by which M. Rivier would refuse to be bound by the doctrines of the Bible, the facts, too, may be refused? Undoubtedly, replies, for example, Mr. G. Frommel: religion cannot consist of,

or rest upon, external facts any more than upon external doctrines: <sup>1</sup>—

“By their very nature historical facts lack the special evidence which is indispensable for faith. The most certain of them are only probable. Their probability, by the accumulation of evidences and the weight of the testimony, may increase until it grazes certitude, but it never attains it. The best evidenced historical facts rest on intermediary witnesses, with regard to whom doubt remains permissible. Were they even absolutely proved, they would remain in essence incapable of forming authority for faith, the object of which cannot in any case be a historical fact—and, above all, not a past fact—and which demands for its establishment the discernment in history of a divine activity, the initiative and permanent character of which forms upon one a directly accessible impression.”

That is to say, past facts can enter into the essence of Christianity just as little as past dogmas: the essence of Christianity must be found wholly in what is present to the soul here and now. In reducing to absurdity the position of those who cry that Christianity consists of facts, not dogmas, M. Bois has only driven them to the position of another class who equally refuse to allow the validity of Christian doctrine,—those whose cry is that Christianity consists in life, not doctrine. This position comes before us thus as the logical outcome of the demands of those who will have Christianity consist only of facts, and not at all of dogmas.

Before we turn to the consideration of this new position, however, there is an extreme form of the contention that Christianity consists of facts, not doctrines, which claims our attention. This is that

<sup>1</sup> *La Crise du protestantisme*, in *Évangile et Liberté*, 27th May, 1892; quoted by Henri Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 72.

curious religious positivism which has gained such vogue of late through the vigour of the followers of Albrecht Ritschl, and which occupies a sort of transitional position between the type of thought which declares that Christianity consists in facts, not dogmas, and that which represents it as consisting in life, not doctrine. The extremity of this position resides in the circumstance that, while it agrees in general that Christianity consists not in dogmas but facts, it reduces these facts to a single fact: Christianity consists, it says in effect, in one sole fact.

That no dogmas lie at the root or enter into the essence of Christianity, the proper Ritschlite is perfectly assured. Religion is one thing, he tells us, and metaphysics is another; and Christianity is in essence religion, while dogmas are metaphysical products. The service which Jesus did the world was not that He presented it with a revealed metaphysic, but that He gave it a religion. The metaphysical element came into historical Christianity when, in its advance from its primitive centre and from its primitive simplicity, it came into contact with and bondage to the Greek mind, which at once seized upon it and, according to the inherent Greek tendency, philosophised it, and thus wrought out what we call the fundamental Christian dogmas. These, therefore, so far from being essential to Christianity, are corruptions of Christianity. And if we would have Christianity in its purity, we must strip off from it every remnant of "Greek dogma," or, to speak more broadly, every "meta-

physical" element which has in the course of the ages attached itself to it. More, if we would save Christianity from entire destruction in the searching criticism of these modern times, we must separate from it those metaphysical accretions by its connection and consequent confusion with which it is brought into conflict with modern knowledge. If it is to be entangled with an outworn metaphysics, it cannot live in the light of modern thought. But let it be freed from all such entangling alliances, we are told, and stand forth in its purity as a simple religion, and philosophy and science will find that, as Satan found with Christ, they "have nothing in it." The effect desired to be obtained by this sharp distinction between the religious and the metaphysical, it will be seen, is the security of Christianity in the forum of the world's thought. The whole realm of the metaphysical is at once abandoned to the world, while that of the purely religious alone is retained for Christianity; and the two spheres are represented practically as mutually exclusive. Religion cannot properly intrude into the region of metaphysics, and metaphysics cannot invade the region of pure religion. Thus Christianity will be safe from attack on this side. But it is not only on the side of metaphysics that Christianity is attacked in these days. It is attacked also on the side of history. It is not only her "dogmas" that are assaulted, but also her "facts." When we yield up her "dogmas" to the mercy of the metaphysician, are we to defend at all hazards her "facts"? Is Christianity

to be represented as standing or falling with them? No, says the Ritschlite. Christianity has no more need of its so-called "facts" than of its so-called "dogmas"; one fact alone will suffice for it, the one great fact of Christ. Let historical criticism do its worst, let it evaporate into the mist of myth every fact on which men have been accustomed to found Christianity, Christianity will remain untouched: it is constituted by this one fact only—Jesus Christ.

Such, then, is the Ritschlite position, in, at least, its most characteristic form. That there are elements of truth and power in it is obvious on the face of the statement. It is much to protest against the identification of Christianity with the changing metaphysics of the schools; and it is undeniable that Christianity has often been confounded by the Hegelian with his Hegelianism, by the Aristotelian with his Aristotelianism, by the Platonist with his Platonism, and has thus been subjected to unwarranted suspicion and distrust. It is something also to realise that Christianity may survive the loss of many of her "facts"; that though her history is true and is worthy of her, and being worthy of her, is part of her being and one of her supports and stays, yet she does not draw all her sap from this one root. Above all, it is a great thing to have our eyes focused on Jesus Christ as the great, the constitutive fact of Christianity, about whom all else gathers, from whom all else receives its significance, whom to have is indeed to have all. Through its insistence on such points as

these, Ritschlism has often wrought a good work in the theological circles of Germany, and earned for itself a good degree. But, unfortunately, the theory it has put forward goes in its logical implications fatally beyond insistence on such points as these.

It is hard to take seriously the sharp discrimination that is proposed between religious and metaphysical knowledge; and it is hard to take patiently the complacent abandonment of the whole body of Christian doctrine which is proposed on the basis of this distinction. One is tempted to look upon it all as "playing to the galleries," as merely a clumsy flattery offered to the tendencies of an age essentially positivist. In an era when even our psychologists seek to steer clear of metaphysics, it is possibly not to be wondered at that a theology also should be attempted which shall be free from "metaphysical" conceptions. And certainly it can not be wondered at that the failure is even more complete. M. Fouillée warns us that if we question those who reject "metaphysics" we shall very quickly discover that they reject it in the name of a metaphysical system, which naturally is their own.<sup>1</sup> It is so in the present case also. The whole Ritschlite system is the outgrowth of metaphysical theories drawn from Kant through the mediation of Lotze. On the basis of these metaphysical theories, we are asked to

<sup>1</sup> "Interrogez ceux qui rejettent la métaphysique; vous reconnaîtrez bien vite qu'ils la rejettent au nom d'un système métaphysique, qui est naturellement le leur" (Alf. Fouillée, *L'Avenir de la métaphysique fondée sur l'expérience*, p. 275; quoted by H. Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 51, note).

eviscerate Christianity of its whole doctrinal content as being mixed with metaphysical elements! Nor do we, in saying the "whole doctrinal content" of Christianity, overstate the matter. For what truth concerning God and the soul can come to expression without involving metaphysical conceptions? Every religious truth, however primary, contains a metaphysical element. M. Bois is therefore within the limits of fact when he says<sup>1</sup> that—

"Those who thus repel metaphysics do not understand themselves. For if it is certain that all that is metaphysical is not on that account religious, it is no less certain that all that is religious is on that account metaphysical. If you wish to be rid of metaphysics at any cost, abstain from speaking of God. Whoever says, 'I believe in God,' deals with metaphysics."

It must be admitted, however, that the Ritschlites, having placed their brand upon metaphysics in religion, do make the boldest possible effort to cleanse their skirts of it altogether. And herein, for us, lies their severest reproach. For at the bidding of this theory, some have not hesitated to discard the most elementary truths of religion. M. Bois says that we cannot even say, "I believe in God," without a tinge of metaphysics. We fully believe it. And the Ritschlite perceives it also, and actually raises the question whether we may validly even say so much as this, "I believe in God!" What do we, after all, as Christian men, know of God, it is asked. That he is infinite? Certainly not. That He is a person? No. That he exists? Not even this. We only know that he is, as Ritschl

<sup>1</sup> *Le Dogme Grec*, pp. 51, 52.

himself once put it, a "Hilfsvorstellung"—a useful postulate for the validating of our practical ends.<sup>1</sup> "God, in other words"—as Dr. Denney<sup>2</sup> brings out Ritschl's idea—

"God, in other words, is a necessary assumption of the Christian's view of man's chief end; but, scientifically,—in its bearing on the interpretation of nature and history, for example,—it may be left an open question whether there be a God or not."

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Otto Ritschl thinks that his father's former employment of the term *Hilfsvorstellung* in this connection ought not to be remembered against him. But with the excision of the term we do not see that the conception has been changed. God still remains for Ritschl and Ritschlism a heuristic postulate. The case is the same, of course, with the Deity of Christ and its implications, as, for example, His pre-existence, which Ritschl similarly spoke of as a *Hilfslinie* for the traditional conception,—comparing it thus with the imaginary lines assumed in geometrical reasonings, which have no reality, and are intended to have none. We note Prof. Otto Ritschl's welcome declaration that it might as well be asserted of his father that he denied the existence of God and taught atheism, as that he did not intend to teach the Deity of Christ as a reality; and we rejoice in this testimony to Ritschl's personal faith in two matters which do indeed stand for him in similar relations. We rejoice, too, in the concessions which Ritschlites have been led to make in the matter of the proper Deity of Christ (see them exhibited in Orr, as cited, p. 448 *sq.*). But we are not here concerned with Ritschl's personal convictions, nor with the indications in his followers of a not unnatural recoil from the full rigour of his teaching, but with the logical implications of that teaching itself. And there is after all a considerable difference between God as a working hypothesis and the ἀληθινὸς θεὸς of the New Testament. For one thing, those to whom God is a working hypothesis are apt to conceive of Him as their creature who cannot be permitted to wander from the place and function He was called into being to fill and serve. The extremity of this feeling was startlingly exhibited by Heine, who, when asked in his anguish whether he had hope of forgiveness, replied, "Oh, certainly: that is what God is for." The distance between this attitude and the Christian conception of God is measured by the contrast between looking upon God as existing for us and realising that we exist only for Him.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Theology*, p. 8; cf. Orr, *Christian View*, etc., p. 45.



In similar spirit, Herrmann teaches that for "the maintaining of the impulse of religious faith," "it does not matter whether our conception of the world is theistic, pantheistic, or materialistic."<sup>1</sup> This is what we may come to when we refuse every metaphysical element in religion, and insist that all we need know of God is what is involved in the residuum of religious knowledge. It is the old idea of regulative truth brought back, in the extreme form which includes the implication that what is postulated as true for the needs of our practical life may in the sphere of theoretical knowledge be at the same time recognised as false.<sup>2</sup>

And this mode of dealing with the foundations of Christianity is carried by this school, also, as we have said, into the domain of "facts." Dr. Denney quotes<sup>3</sup> a characteristic example from Harnack when dealing with the miracles of Jesus. "The historian," says Harnack,<sup>4</sup>

"is not in a position to reckon with a miracle as a certainly given historical event; for in doing so he destroys that very method of looking at things on which all historical investigation rests. Every

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<sup>1</sup> See Orr, *Christian View of God and the World*, pp. 46 sq.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Orr, as above, p. 29: "Under the plea of expelling metaphysics from theology, the tendency is at present to revive this distinction in a form which practically amounts to the resuscitation of the old doctrine of a 'double truth'—the one religious, the other philosophical; and it is not held necessary that even where the two overlap they should always be found in agreement."

<sup>3</sup> *Studies in Theology*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Dogmengeschichte*, Ed. 1, i. 50, note 4; cf. E. T. i., p. 65, note 3, where, however, the concluding words are quite different: "This conclusion itself belongs to the province of religious faith: though

single miracle remains, historically, entirely dubious : and no summation of the dubious can ever amount to a certainty. If, in spite of this, the historian convinces himself that Jesus Christ has done what is extraordinary, and even in the strict sense miraculous, he argues from an ethico-religious impression which he has received of this person, to a supernatural power belonging to Him. This inference belongs itself to the domain of religious faith. We may conceive, however, a strong religious faith in the teleological reign of the divine and the good in the world, which does not need such an inference."

That is to say, as Dr. Denney points out, "since it belongs to the domain of religious faith, it cannot belong to the domain of assured fact," and it is only to those of little faith that the supernatural power and miracles of Jesus are not matters of indifference. From passages like this we may begin to learn the real import of the constant Ritschlite appeal to the historical Jesus—that fervent and devout appeal to the very central fact of Christianity which gives their writings such attractiveness to us all.

By the emphasis which they place upon the "historical Christ," who, according to them, is the one great constitutive fact of Christianity, the Ritschlites intend first of all to exclude from consideration the exalted Christ—the Christ who, according to His promise, is with His followers always, even to the end of the world, the living source of all their strength and the fountain of all their life. For this school of

there has seldom been a strong faith that would not have drawn it." The German of Ed. 1 (which alone is accessible to us as we write) runs: "Dieser Schluss gehört selbst dem Gebiet des religiösen Glaubens an. Es lässt sich aber ein starker religiöser Glaube an die Herrschaft und Zwecksetzung des Göttlichen und Guten in der Welt denken, welcher eines solchen Schlusses nicht bedarf."

thought, which piques itself on its positivism, has no greater antipathy to what it calls "metaphysics" in religion than to what it calls "mysticism." It would indeed be introducing "metaphysical" elements to conceive of Jesus, dead for two thousand years, yet ruling the world from the throne of God and instilling life by some magical process into the hearts of men. No! we can know nothing but the "historical Christ," the Christ who lived and died in Galilee, and by His life of pure faith has left an indelible impression upon the world. He, at least, is a fact; and a fact of such magnitude that face to face with Him we cannot escape the conviction which was the spring of His life and which, from the spectacle of His life, is communicated to us, that there is a God who loves us, and that we are not merely the "step-children of time."

Yet we must guard ourselves from supposing that this historical Christ to which we have thus been pointed is the Christ of the historical documents which have preserved the memory of His life and deeds to us. For, by the emphasis which they place on the "historical Christ," the Ritschlites intend, in the next place, to exclude all "unhistorical" elements from the picture they would bring before us. It is not the Christ of legend to which they would direct our eyes, but the Christ of sober history: and they are willing to relegate to the domain of legend all that the most exigent criticism would ask of them. It is not the Christ who was born of a virgin, who was welcomed by angels, who wrought wonders, who,

having died for our sins, rose again from the dead and ascended in bodily form into heaven—it is not this Christ who, according to them, is the one great constitutive fact of Christianity. It is the Christ of critical history: of whom we can say but this—that He lived and died and left behind Him the aroma of a life of faith. This is the one fact of which Christianity consists. We cannot rid ourselves of the impression which this historical figure makes upon us, of the lesson of faith which His life teaches us: in its light we can walk our allotted pathway in life and see the hand of Jesus' God in the events that befall us, and so live, like Jesus, in communion with the God of providence: the religion of Jesus is thus ours, and we are Christians. Who Jesus was, what He was, what He did—all this is indifferent to us: His life of love in the world has begotten religion in our souls; and this is enough. It is to this that the Ritschlite point of view would reduce the "historical Christ"—the one fact that constitutes Christianity. And if we find it hard to take patiently their complacent abandonment of the whole sum of Christian doctrine on the plea that it is metaphysical, shall we not find it impossible to take patiently their equally complacent abandonment of the whole series of Christian facts, on the ground that it is unhistorical?

The inconsistency of the Ritschlite procedure here has often been commented on. First, in their anti-metaphysical bias, they insist on the historical character of Christianity: Christianity is not meta-

physics but fact : it is to the historical Christ, and not to the Christ of theological construction, that we are to go—the Christ that actually lived and died in Galilee, not the Christ of the Nicene Greeks or of the scholastics. And then this historical Christ Himself is calmly handed over to the tender mercies of unbelieving critics, with permission to do with Him what they list. It is more to our present purpose, however, to note the effect of this double dealing, in the evaporation of the whole essence of Christianity. We all desire a Christianity which is secure from the assaults of the unbelieving world, whether those assaults are made in the name of philosophy and science, or in the name of history and criticism. But this security is to be sought and can be found only in a Christianity whose facts and doctrines are so intrenched against the inevitable assault that, whatever else falls, they shall stand. What fatuity it is to seek it rather by yielding to the assault all it chooses to demand, and contracting Christianity into dimensions too narrow to call out the world's antipathy and too weak to invite its attack. Such an eviscerated Christianity may no longer be worth the world's notice, and by that same token is no longer worth the Christian's preservation. It has been reduced to a vanishing point, and is ready to pass away. It is entirely fatuous to suppose that the spheres of religion and thought, of religion and history, can be kept apart : what is true in metaphysics is true in religion, and what is true in religion is true in history, or, in one

word, we shall profess ourselves willing to confess a false religion. We may acquiesce in the implications of the persistent activity of our religious sentiment. Let metaphysics decide the problems of being as it may, let criticism decide the problems of history as it may, man is a religious animal. But to say that the special form and direction which have been given to the action of this religious sentiment by a specific body of convictions and a specific body of facts are independent of philosophical and historical determinations, passes beyond the apparent absurdity of paradox into the actually absurd. It sounds very well to ask, as M. Lobstein asks<sup>1</sup>—

“To declare that the full and complete satisfaction of the needs of the conscience and the aspirations of the heart is involved in the solution of a problem of historical criticism of *whatever importance*—is this not to cast souls into trouble and to expose them to the loss of that crown which they are exhorted to hold fast?”

But it is surely one thing for the soul to be sure with an immovable surety that the conceptions—that is, the “dogmas”—and the facts that underlie its faith and are implicated in it cannot be shaken by any criticism whatever: and quite another thing for one to imagine that he can lightly surrender them at the demand of any criticism you will and yet retain his faith undiminished. Accordingly, M. Bois justly fixes his eye on the extremity of M. Lobstein’s language: that faith cannot depend on the solution of a problem of historical criticism, *no matter what its importance may be*—

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by H. Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 54.

“Will it be indifferent, then, to the Christian faith,” he demands,<sup>1</sup> “for it to be demonstrated that we do not possess a single authentic writing of Paul’s that the Fourth Gospel is the work of a forger, and that the Synoptics are only a tissue of legends and traditions without the least historical value? Will it, then, be indifferent to the Christian faith for it to be proved to us, for example, that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead or even that He never existed? We should very much like to know what will remain to Christianity when there have been excluded from it the *ideas* (since metaphysics must be excluded) and the *facts* (since we must be independent of historical criticism). Note that thus the person of Christ is completely eliminated from Christianity, and it is reduced to vague, obscure, doubtful sentiment—to sentiment in its pure estate. On the other side, do we not know that the school of Ritschl does not wish to hear the *mystical union* spoken of, that is to say, internal, personal and living relations between the soul and its Saviour? What then is left of Christianity? Nothing at all—except, perhaps, the maxim of certain mediæval monks: Bene dicere de priore, facere officium suum taliter qualiter, sinere mundum ire quomodo vadit. In all ways, the reaction against intellectualism, pushed to the complete proscription of doctrine, of metaphysics, brings us to nihilism in the matter of religion.”

Thus we see that the Ritschlian tendency also reduces itself to absurdity in the extremes to which it must go in order to save its principle. For to these extremes it must go or else admit a metaphysical, a truly dogmatic element at the very heart of Christianity. Recoil from them ever so slightly, and the centre of the debate is at once shifted: we no longer are discussing *whether* “dogma” enters into the essence of Christianity, but *what* “dogmas” may be rightly recognised as holding that position. Jesus Christ alone constitutes Christianity; in Him is included all that can be asked for, for the perfect religion. So be it. What Jesus Christ? The Jesus of the Gospels? Or

<sup>1</sup> *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 54.

the Jesus of Strauss? The Logos Jesus of John's Gospel? The heavenly Jesus of the Apocalypse? Or the purely earthly Jesus of Pfleiderer and Rénan? Or even perchance the entirely imaginary Jesus of Pierson and Naber and Loman? It is an insult to our intelligence to tell us that it makes no difference to Christianity how these queries be answered. But the first beginnings of an answer to them introduce the dogmatic element. From which it follows at once that Christianity cannot exist without the dogma which it is the business of Systematic Theology to investigate and state. As M. Henri Bois<sup>1</sup> eloquently puts it—

“Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ. Still we must enter into relations with this person. In order that two moral subjects should communicate with one another there must needs be manifestations between them. A person manifests himself clearly to us only by his acts and his words; and he has value for us only as we form for ourselves a certain idea of him. Christianity is therefore essentially, above all, a person; but on pain of reducing it to a magic, which would no longer possess any ethical and, consequently, no longer possess any religious quality, we must needs grant that Christianity, precisely because it is *essentially* a person, is also a body of *facts* and of *ideas*.

“For the contemporaries of Jesus Christ, who could see and hear Him, the teaching that fell from His lips, and the deeds performed by Him, constituted this necessary middle term between Jesus Christ and them. For us, with no wish certainly to deny the personal, present, and living relations of Jesus Christ with the soul of the redeemed, we cannot, without opening the door to the most dangerous mysticism, reduce Christianity to these relations, in derogation of the acts and revelations of the historical Christ, which we have neither seen nor heard, but which have been transmitted to us by tradition, by the Bible; this would be equivalent to cutting down the tree at its roots, under pretext of being thus better able to gather its fruit.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 107.



On pain, then, of cutting down Christianity at its roots, under the pretext that we shall thus be better able to gather its fruits, we must admit a doctrinal element at its very basis. Christianity consists not merely of "Jesus Christ," but of that Jesus Christ which the apostles give us—in a word, of the Jesus of the apostolical "dogma," and not of any Jesus we may choose to fancy in this nineteenth century of ours.<sup>1</sup> Are there "metaphysical" elements in this apostolical dogma? Then metaphysical elements enter into the very essence of Christianity. Are there traces of Greek thought perhaps in these apostolical interpretations of the Christian facts? Of what importance is that to us? M. Bois says truly—

"Whether there be in these interpretations Greek elements or not, is a very secondary question, and one wholly without the importance that it is sought to give it. There is no good reason known to us for rejecting a teaching of St. Paul's or of St. John's, under the pretext that it has a Hellenic colour."

The apostolic interpretation is an inseparable element in the fundamental fact-basis of Christianity; and it cannot be rejected because a part of the providentially formed peculiarity of the apostolic mode of thought is distasteful to us.<sup>2</sup> Call it metaphysical, call it Greek,

<sup>1</sup> "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and *Him as crucified*," said the apostle, defining a special doctrine of Jesus as the essence of Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. E. L. Hicks' suggestive paper on "St. Paul and Hellenism," which opens the fourth volume of the Oxford *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica*, will well repay consulting on this matter. "Greek thought," he says, "had provided for St. Paul a vocabulary, and a set of ideas as well as phrases, wherein to express his doctrine—a doctrine in nowise borrowed from Hellenic thought, but which could hardly be made in-

if you will. But remember that it is of the essence of Christianity.

By no means, the answer comes back to us at once: Christianity is a life, not a doctrine; he is a Christian man in whom this life is implanted; and the Bible itself is in the first instance a means of grace, not a text-book of theology. Thus we are brought back once more to that extremest of all anti-doctrinal positions which proposes a Christianity which shall be independent of both facts and doctrines. We have already had a glimpse of it now and again; and it is probably clear by this time that, if the onset on doctrinal Christianity is to succeed at all, it must be under this banner. It is towards it indeed that every other tendency of thought inevitably drifts, as it seeks to defend an anti-doctrinal position. According to its mode of thinking, the sole immediate purpose of the Bible is to quicken life, not to satisfy curiosity, and we divert it from its proper use when we go to it as anything else than the living and abiding word through which we are begotten again—than the implanted word which is able to save our souls. When it has performed this function its immediate employment is at an end; its dogmas and its facts may alike telligible to the minds of his time, or to our own minds to-day, unless Greek thought had prepared the human mind for such grand and far-reaching ideas: *ὁ γὰρ φιλόσοφος συνοπτικός τις.* “The influence of Hellenism began, in fact, with the first preaching of the gospel; and St. Paul is the foremost representative of the process. That influence was of course indirect and unconscious, and did not involve any deliberate adoption of Hellenic practices, but it had been a leaven working in the Church from the first.”

be passed by in indifference when we possess the life—that Christ-life which, being once formed in us, surely renders us superior to all extraneous aid. And for the inception of this life we cannot be dependent on any book or on any dogmas or facts whatever, laid hold of by the intellect and embraced in knowledge. Its source can only be the Fountain of Life—our living and loving God Himself; and He cannot be supposed to grant it only to shining intellectual gifts, or to exceptional intellectual opportunities, or to the knowledge which is the fruit of these things. The poorest is as the richest before Him, and poverty of understanding is no bar to His grace; while that poverty of spirit which is seldom conjoined with great knowledge—for knowledge rather puffeth up—is precious in His sight. Christianity is ill-conceived if it is thought to consist in or to rest upon either facts or dogmas; it is a life, and for this life we depend solely on God, the ever-living Source of all life.<sup>1</sup>

It will go without saying that a manner of thinking like this, which has commended itself to a multitude of the leading minds of our time, and which has extended its influence so far beyond the circle of its own proper adherents that it may be truly said to have coloured all modern religious thought, has much to say for itself. We need only turn over in our minds its characteristic modes of expression to find enshrined in them the deepest truths of Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. Orr's discussion of this mode of statement in his *Christian View*, etc., pp. 18 sq.

It is true that Christianity is a life, the life that is lived in communion with the Son of God, the life that is hid with Christ in God, the life of which it must be said that it is not we that live it, but Christ that lives it in us. The whole series of Christian facts, the whole body of Christian doctrines, do exist only in order to this life. Christ did not come into the world, die, and rise again, merely that He might insert so many marvellous facts into the dull course of natural history: the constitution of the facts, the beautifying of the historical sequence, was not the end of His action; it was to save the souls of men, that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. And no single Christian doctrine has been revealed to men merely as a tenet in philosophy, to make them wise; each and every one is sent to them as a piece of glad tidings, that they may be made wise unto salvation. Yet though all Christian knowledge is thus only in order to life, and terminates on life, it is not in the power of all knowledge to give life. We live by the power of the Son of God, by virtue of a vital relation of our souls to Him; and it is only because of the indwelling of the Spirit of God in our hearts that our ears are open to the truth, or that our souls are amenable to its discipline. This Christian life that we live is not the creation of the doctrines or of the facts of Christianity; it is the working of the Spirit of God, who, abiding within us, becomes to us a second and higher self. These are the fundamental elements of the gospel of Christ; and

we count it a most happy thing that they are emphasised as the school of thought which we have now under view emphasises them. Above all, we rejoice that in the face of a positivist and materialistic age there have arisen men who so boldly proclaim the reality of the divine life, the actual presence of God in men, and the prevalent work of the Spirit in the heart. To the Ritschlite, of the extremer sort, at least, it is as if there were no Holy Spirit; the spirit of the Christian community—*i.e.*, the general influence that exhales from Christians as a body—takes its place; it is as if there were no divine power within us working for righteousness; all that is allowed is a simply human ethicism, supported by a bare belief in a loving Providence—a bare belief which cannot reach the height of theoretical knowledge. But the very core of the teaching now engaging our attention is the great conception of the indwelling God; and we are profoundly grateful to it for making Christian mysticism once more a power in the world.

With the heartiest recognition, however, of the precious elements of truth which are embraced in this mode of thought, and of the service it has rendered in emphasising them, we may still be unable to allow that it is able to do justice to Christianity, or even to those special elements of Christianity which it thus has taken up, when, in its preoccupation with the sharp separation which it institutes between life and doctrine, it declares that Christianity consists wholly in life, and not at all in doctrine. It may

possibly conduce to a clearer understanding of what the real implications of this contention are, if we will select some fair representative of the school of thought whose watchword it forms, and seek through him to learn its fundamental ideas. Fortunately this has been rendered especially easy by the recent publication, on the part of the learned Professor of Reformed Theology at Paris, Professor Auguste Sabatier, of certain documents apparently designed precisely to serve as a manifesto of his school.<sup>1</sup> In the discussion which necessarily arose among French Protestants around such utterances, the chief burden in behalf of the essential doctrines of Christianity was borne at first by the venerable Professor Frederic Godet,<sup>2</sup> from whose expositions of Scripture we have all profited, and more latterly by the brilliant young professor of Montauban, from whom we have already quite largely quoted in this paper, Professor Henri Bois.<sup>3</sup> During the course of the controversy the postulates and implications of the mode of conceiving Christianity advocated by Professor Sabatier have naturally been brought under a very searching light, with the result of exhibiting in the clearest way their utter inability

<sup>1</sup> Especially his *La Vie Intime des Dogmes et leur Puissance d'Évolution*, and his *Essai d'une Théorie Critique de la Connaissance Religieuse*.

<sup>2</sup> Papers in the *Chrétien Évangélique* for 1891 and 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Especially in his *Le Dogme Grec* and his *De la Connaissance Religieuse*. In the latter work, pp. 5 *sq.*, M. Bois gives an exact account of the primary literature in the controversy. An interesting narrative of the early stages of the controversy was given by the late Professor Gretillat in the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for July 1892 and July 1893.

to do justice to, or even to preserve the essence of, Christianity.

At the bottom of all M. Sabatier's religious thinking there proves to lie a crass philosophical empiricism, or, to be more precise, the empiricism of Mr. Herbert Spencer. Out of this empiricism there springs immediately the fundamental principle of his theory of knowledge, which is none other than the ordinary postulate of the sensational school—now being anew pressed upon our acceptance by certain of our physiological psychologists<sup>1</sup>—that sensation lies behind, and is the source of all knowledge. In its strictness, M. Sabatier's contention is that "feeling comes first in time as well as in value: ideas come only afterwards, and ideas cannot produce feeling, or, if they can produce it, this happens so imperfectly and so rarely that we need not take account of this in the role of ideas"<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, sensation does produce ideas, and all our ideas rest ultimately on and are the product of sensation: "our ideas are only the algebraic notation of our impressions and of our movements."<sup>3</sup> When carried over into the sphere of religion, this philosophical theory of knowledge becomes M. Sabatier's fundamental theological postu-

<sup>1</sup> "The tendency of physiological psychology is to make *feeling* the origin of intellect on the one hand, and of will on the other. . . . Sensation is the feeling that points towards the intellect. Desire is the feeling that points towards the will."—*W. T. Harris*.

<sup>2</sup> H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> E. Gounelle, in the Montauban *Revue de Théologie*, May 1895, p. 299.

late. As sensation is the mother of ideas, so the Christian life is the mother of Christian doctrine. Life, then, is before doctrine, not merely in importance, but in time: and doctrine is only a product of the Christian life. It follows, of course, at once that God does not reveal Himself except through and by means of the Christian life: there is and cannot be any such thing as an "objective revelation." "God reveals Himself only in and by piety," and it "is faith that produces dogmas." A Christian life is first quickened in man: that Christian life effloresces into Christian action; and one form of action being intellectual action, Christian action ultimates among other things in Christian thought, knowledge, doctrine. As M. Dandiran puts it clearly<sup>1</sup>—

"We need a dogmatic; there is a Christian verity in Christianity; there is a Christian philosophy; it is the most extensive of all philosophies. Only, *instead of placing it at the beginning, I place it at the end*; instead of making it precede the Christian life, we make it proceed from the Christian life. This is the difference between us and our opponents, but it is great enough to make us say, Here are two opposed theologies."

All Christian doctrine being thus but the manifestation of precedent Christian life, doctrine will, of course, vary as the Christian life varies. And here M. Sabatier brings in and operates with the conception of evolution—the evolution of religion, and with it the evolution of religious thought, and finally of Christian dogmas. In the course of human develop-

<sup>1</sup> In *Évangile et Liberté*, Sept. 4, 1891; quoted by H. Bois in *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 28.



ment, which has proceeded always naturally and normally, man has disengaged himself little by little from animalism and gradually created himself man. In the course of this upward growth he has slowly attained the free life of the spirit: his first religious stage was that of egoism, corresponding to the religions of nature; then came the stage of moralism; and lastly, the stage of "the consciousness of Christ, in which a new relation springs up between God and man, the relation of love." Thus as the religion of law succeeded the nature religions, the religion of love has succeeded the religion of law. But the stream still flows on; and as the stream of spiritual life still flows on, inevitably the stream of religious ideas dependent on the spiritual life also flows on, and our doctrines vary, age by age, in spite of ourselves. The children may speak the words of the fathers, but they cannot mean them in the same sense. The river of the underlying spiritual life, and the river of intellectual concepts and doctrinal ideas dependent on the fluctuations of the spiritual life, inevitably flow on for ever.

This is, then, what M. Sabatier means when he says that Christianity is a life, not a doctrine. And it is quite clear that, when taken in its entirety, the theory amounts to the formal renunciation of Christianity as anything else than one stage in the religious development of humanity, having, like all other stages of religious development, in its life its relative fitness and value, and in its teachings its relative truth—

relative to the times and the men to which it belongs and which have given it birth; but possessing as little absoluteness of value or truth as any stage of religious development which has preceded it. Religion, too, he tells us, is "subject to the law of transformation which dominates the manifestations of human life and that life itself"; and it is therefore folly for orthodoxy to wish to "elevate to the absolute what was born in time and must necessarily be subject to modification if it is to live in time":<sup>1</sup> we cannot bar the course of a river by building a dam across it. Thus, in M. Sabatier's conception everything is in a flux; and the doctrines which Christianity proclaims, and even the form of life which underlies them and of which they are the expression, are only one evanescent moment in the ceaseless advance of mankind. As M. Godet has eloquently put it, from this point of view<sup>2</sup>—

"This religion is, like all those that have preceded it, only a temporary form of human development—'one of the day's works of humanity,' as Lermnier said—a simple product of consciousness and reason on the road of indefinite progress, a form of the religious life of which it cannot be affirmed any more confidently than it may of all its predecessors, that it is the last. One who was in some sort the representative of this point of view—M. Scherer—expressed it thus: 'Christianity, the fruit of a long elaboration of the human consciousness, destined to prepare for other elaborations, represents only one of the phases of the universal transformation.' This is to proclaim, as sharply as possible, the perpetual banishment of authority in matters of faith. An authority intervening in this continuous work would mark in it a point of arrest, and would become a fetter upon the spontaneous progress which is looked upon as the supreme law of history.

<sup>1</sup> Citations in H. Bois' *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, pp. 204, 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Chrétien Évangélique*, April 20, 1891, pp. 148, 149; quoted by H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, pp. 348, 349.

From this point of view the sacred books of the Christians have no other kind of value for religious thought than that which may be possessed for philosophical thought by the treatises of Aristotle or the dialogues of Plato: interesting documents, no doubt, they could have no authority."

That M. Sabatier has admitted to his mind such implications of his theory of evolution as applied to religion, inclusive of Christianity, as are here suggested, such sentences as the following assure us:—

"The transformation of religious ideas does not always take place in a violent fashion. It is more frequently insensible, but it never pauses, whatever precautions may be taken or whatever barriers may be thrown up against it. The river of the spiritual life flows on continuously."

"The sons pronounce the same words with the fathers, but they no longer understand them in the same way."

"We continually speak of the inspiration of the prophets and apostles, of expiation, of the Trinity, of the divinity of Christ, of miracles, but we understand them, *peu ou prou*, otherwise than our fathers. The river flows on for ever."

It is this last remark which gave occasion to the following eloquent comment of M. Godet's:<sup>1</sup>—

"You drop this phrase as in passing; but it rouses much thought. . . . What river flows thus continually on? No doubt that of doctrinal ideas, of intellectual concepts; that is [according to your conception] the 'essentially variable element.' It flows on continually, this doctrinal river, transforming itself, purifying itself, spiritualising itself, from its source on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret to its present mouth on the Boulevard Arago. And who are these fathers of whom you speak, and with whom we are no longer in accord, we their children of the nineteenth century? Luther and Calvin? I comfort myself. Augustine and Athanasius, Polycarp and Ignatius? I still comfort myself. St. John, St. Paul? Now I do not so easily comfort myself. Jesus Christ? This time I do not comfort myself

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<sup>1</sup> *Revue Chrétienne*, April 1892, p. 262; quoted by H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 208, where the above clauses from M. Sabatier will be found also.

at all, and I even tremble, although fear is forbidden us. What! we understand the inspiration of the prophets and apostles otherwise than He did? Ah, well, pass on! But expiation, the meaning of His own death? He made a very close connection between His outpoured blood and the remission of our sins. That is to be corrected! The Trinity? The conception of God, whom He called His Father and of whom He said: 'No one knows the Son except the Father; neither the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him!' The divinity of the Son? The conception which, according to the narrative of His disciples, He has given us of His own person! Miracles? Those facts which He considered the *witnesses of the Father* in His behalf, but which we know to-day to have been only the beneficent and natural effects of His personality! Yes, *peu ou prou*, we understand all this—and much else besides, of which I do not here speak—otherwise than He did. And when all this 'Hebrew sediment' has been cast away so as to save only the 'vital germ,' what we have left is 'the consciousness of the Son of God, which has been placed in the midst of history and in the bosom of humanity, as a power of life capable of engendering life after itself.' For me, what strikes me in all this, is that in place of possessing, as I believe I do, a *fulness* in the Christ of the Gospels, I see form itself before me a *void* in which there disappears the Jesus of the Church, the Jesus of Jesus Himself."

It will, of course, go without saying, that M. Sabatier makes a vigorous effort to escape from this empty void to which his theory inevitably conducts him. Despite the necessary implications of his conception that Christianity is but one of the passing phases of the religious life of the race, and its doctrines but the evanescent expression of this passing phase, and Christ Himself but the earliest typical form of this new phase of religious life, M. Sabatier cannot refrain from speaking of the religion of love, with which he identifies Christianity, as the perfect and definitive religion, and of Christ as having perfectly realised this perfect religion in His own life. But if ever an illogical

thinker was fairly scourged out of his inconsistencies, we may believe that M. Sabatier's incoherences of this kind have been cured by M. Bois' lash. M. Bois refuses to believe that, on the theory of religious evolution put forth by M. Sabatier, there can be any necessity or place for such a one as Christians recognising Christ at all. "Is it," he asks,<sup>1</sup>

"that evolution was not sufficient to guarantee the transformation of the religion of law into the religion of love? Why did the Spirit of God, enveloping, penetrating humanity, need anything else than His own universal and continuous action to reveal to us the true way? What necessity could there have been for Jesus Christ to come into the world! You tell me that Jesus Christ was simply the first man in whom evolution introduced the transformation of the religion of law into the religion of love. I reply, In that case it is evident that Jesus Christ represents the lowest degree of the religion of love: evolution has long ago passed Him; we are superior to Him by nineteen centuries of evolution. You wish to say that Jesus Christ perfectly realised the principle of love? That is inconceivable. How can we admit that the highest degree of the religion of love appeared suddenly in a people still entirely immersed in the religion of law? *Natura non facit saltus*. If Jesus Christ actually realised love perfectly, He must have been the end-term of an anterior evolution. It would be necessary to trace this evolution—not an easy task; and then it would be necessary to explain by evolution the spectacle which the nineteen centuries of Christianity present to us: evolution would demand that you should show us a new principle of subjective religion taking the place of the principle of love. But M. Sabatier does not desire this, since he declares that the religion of love is the perfect and definitive religion.

"The perfect and definitive religion! . . . a definitive, unchangeable religion! Have we read aright? Then religion is not after all 'subject to the law of transformation which dominates the manifestations of the human life and that life itself.' . . . The contradiction is flagrant. In order to justify the incomprehensible arrest which evolution underwent when it attained Christ, the ingenious critic declares: 'It is very evident that we are morally able to conceive of

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<sup>1</sup> *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 203.

nothing above the religion of love.' A good reason, indeed! We, religious men of the nineteenth century, we cannot conceive anything better—that is very possible; but what of our descendants of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? And then, methinks, this is strange language from the pen of our author, and shows a singular forgetfulness of his own theories. We are morally able to conceive of nothing above the religious experiences that we are having or have had? Ah, it is too plain. Or, does M. Sabatier renounce his theory, according to which the idea, the conception, follows on the experience? We cannot conceive anything above the experience we have had—because we have had only this experience. But when our posterity have had another experience (it is not my affair how; we know from other passages that religious experience is a kind of inexplicable, spontaneous generation), they will without trouble conceive something superior to the religion of the men of the nineteenth century. By what right do you erect into a universal law your personal faculty of conceiving or not conceiving that empirical product of the exercise and habitudes of your own thought? By what right do you affirm that our successors will not have experiences superior to ours? No experience permits you such an affirmation.

“. . . It does not seem to me that our subtle theoriser can escape from the objection drawn from his own premises to his own point of view. If continuous transformation is the universal law, if religion itself has evolved during so many centuries, we cannot see why religion should suddenly become immutable and definitive—we do not see why Jesus Christ should occupy the preponderant place which Christians attribute to Him. M. Sabatier affirms that it is because in Christ and by Christ religion attained a certain point of moral perfection; but how do we know that we have not advanced far beyond what was for him morality and religion? And otherwise, this does not remove the contradiction. . . . If we place ourselves at the point of view of M. Sabatier's theory of evolution, that theory absolutely interdicts that any symbol whatsoever, any religious word whatsoever, even Jesus Christ, should preserve an eternal value. The river flows on continuously—the river of life, the river of doctrine, the river of the word. What remains permanent? Logically, nothing!”

But if M. Sabatier occasionally thus involves himself in contradiction—whenever, namely, he speaks of Christ and Christianity in the traditional manner, instead of according to the demands of his theory; in

the manner, that is, we may be permitted to believe, in which he learned to speak of them before he had worked his theory out, and which still occasionally tends to usurp its wonted place upon his lips—at other times, as we have seen, he frankly follows the implications of his theory to the legitimate result of really conceiving distinctive Christianity as of no importance to the Christian life. This comes out curiously even in utterances, the fervour and breadth of whose piety are apt to veil their extremity from the hasty reader. Take, for example, the following beautiful passage from his *Discourse on the Evolution of Dogmas*, where he is pleased to imagine<sup>1</sup>

“in one of our churches a great crowd come together for worship. There are, perhaps, in this auditory,” he continues, “poor old women, very ignorant and possibly superstitious, men of the middle class with a tincture of literature, scholars and philosophers who have conned Kant and Hegel, possibly even professors of theology, penetrated to the marrow with the critical spirit. All bow themselves in spirit and adore; all speak the same language learned in infancy; all repeat with heart and lips, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty!’ I do not know if there is on earth a more touching spectacle, anything more like heaven. All these spirits, so different from one another and perhaps incapable of understanding each other in the region of the intellect, really commune with one another; one identical religious sentiment penetrates them and animates them. The moral unity of which Jesus spoke when He said, ‘That they may be one as we are one,’ is for the moment realised on earth. But do you suppose that the same image is awakened in all these spirits by this one word ‘God,’ pronounced by all these lips? The poor old woman, who still remembers the pictures in the big Bible, has a glimpse of the figure of the eternal Father with a great white beard and bright and burning eyes like coals of fire. Her next neighbour would smile at this simple anthropomorphism. He has the Deistic idea, rationally established in his philosophical course at college.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in M. Henri Bois' *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 35.

This notion in turn would appear rude to the disciple of Kant, who knows that all positive ideas of God are contradictory, and who, to escape from contradiction, takes refuge in that of the Unknowable. For all, however, the doctrine of God subsists, and it is because it is still living that it lends itself to so many different interpretations; but it is living—let it be well remarked—only because it serves to express a piety felt in common by all these believers.”

A true and affecting picture, we will all say, of the condition of Christianity in the world to-day, gathering in of every kind in order to elevate and purify their partial or wrong impressions of God, and teach to all who and what really is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Only this is not M. Sabatier's conception of the import of the scene he has brought so vividly before us. To him it is not a picture of Christian imperfections, passing away and to pass away for each of the worshippers as he better learns to know Christ. It is a picture of what is normal in the Christian life, and what most nearly approaches the heavenly state. It is the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer for Christian unity: a unity which exists and flourishes in the presence of the most extreme differences in even the most fundamental conceptions of religion. In a word, M. Sabatier places before us here only another picturesque plea for the extremest religious indifferentism. And therefore the rebuke which was administered to it by the late Professor Charles Bois<sup>1</sup> was fully deserved:—

“I avow myself,” says M. Bois, “not to have thoroughly understood how M. Sabatier can go into ecstasies over the communion of

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<sup>1</sup> *Définition et Rôle de Dogme* in the *Revue Théologique*, 1890, p. 166, quoted by H. Bois, *De la Con. Relig.* p. 36.



the souls which compose his assembly of superstitious devotees, deists, Hegelians, worshippers of the Unknowable—all repeating the ‘I believe in God, the Father Almighty,’ all prostrating themselves before Him, all united in a moral and religious communion which can be compared to the communion of the Father and the Son, and in which we can see realised Jesus’ prayer, ‘That they may be one as we are one.’ What idea does M. Sabatier have of the union of the Father and the Son? What! they are one as the Father and Son are one—they are morally and religiously one, these men, one of whom believes in a God who concerns Himself about him, enters into the details of his life, knows his prayers and answers them; another of whom holds such belief to be superstitious, and believes only in a God who directs the universe by general laws promulgated once for all, without special care for individuals; a third of whom thinks he can affirm nothing of God without contradiction, unless we limit ourselves to calling Him the Unknowable; a fourth of whom, a pupil of Hegel, does not even believe that God knows Himself, and confesses only that He exists! All these worshippers are religiously one! But if they should discover to one another, I do not say the bottom of their thoughts, but the bottom of their hearts, they would perceive as great a contradiction between their sentiments as between their convictions. Their communion is only apparent—it is only in ritual, in formula. And this is just the least touching and the least admirable thing in the world.”

In fine, the goal to which M. Sabatier’s theories have conducted him, is just the proper latitudinarianism of the day. The outcome of his theorising is only to supply a reasoned basis to the unreasoning indifferentism that vexes our time: and we may best look upon his work as an attempt to justify this indifferentism by placing beneath it a philosophical foundation, in a theory of religious knowledge and a theory of religious evolution. Its meaning to us will be, therefore, simply that if doctrinal indifferentism is to stand, this is the basis on which it must build itself; but, on the other hand, if, as we have seen, indifferentism cannot remain Christian except at the cost of admitting the claims

of Christian doctrine and providing for the essential work of that doctrine in forming a distinctively Christian life, then, for the Christian man, this rational basis for indifferentism must fall with it. The arguments against M. Sabatier's theories, in other words, are the arguments against indifferentism in religion; these arguments, indeed, impinge more sharply against his theories than against unreasoned indifferentism, in so far as the points on which they especially impinge were latent in it and are the explicit postulates of his theories.

Indifferentism, we will remember, does not precisely condemn Christian doctrine; it only neglects it. And, true to his indifferentist results, M. Sabatier does not deny the possibility or the right or even the necessity of Christian doctrines, or even of Christian dogmatics. He confesses that a living religion must needs express itself in appropriate religious thinking, and in those doctrines which embody this thinking. For him this is only a special case under the general rule that faith without works is dead. No faith is a living faith which does not produce doctrine. It is not then exactly against the possibility or right of Christian doctrine that he protests: it is only its usefulness that he denies.<sup>1</sup> He conceives it not as the former-

<sup>1</sup> It must be confessed that the writers of this school are not always entirely consistent with themselves on this point. When M. Sabatier (*De la Vie Intime des Dogmes*, pp. 25, 26) says: "In suppressing Christian dogma, we suppress Christianity; in casting off absolutely all religious doctrine, we kill religion itself. . . . A religious life which does not express itself would not be aware of itself, would not

and director of faith, the occasion of its rise and determiner of its form, but as the product of faith, and therefore as only the manifestation and index of the underlying life. Life does not, therefore, fluctuate, and the nature of faith change, according to doctrine; but doctrine fluctuates according to the life-movements of which it is only a reflection. And since life is movement, and vitality may be measured by richness of vital motion, it follows that changeableness in doctrine is not an evil, but a sign of abounding life. The more unstable a doctrine is, the more living it is: a really living Christianity, we are told, renders its doctrinal product peculiarly supple and malleable.<sup>1</sup> In this, as it seems, we reach the very apotheosis of religious indifferentism. We are prepared in its light not only to look upon variations in doctrine with indifference; we shall anxiously seek for them as the mark of a deep and rich religious life. Periods of doctrinal unrest and uncertainty will be-

communicate itself"—he is still speaking on the lines of his theory. But M. Astié (*La Fin des Dogmes*, in *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, July 1891, pp. 372, 374) seems to pass beyond its bounds when he writes: "A development of dogma is indispensable, of the very first necessity. Practical piety by itself is insufficient. . . . Christian feeling, which is, of course, the first factor, on pain of lapsing into fanaticism, into subjective fantasy, needs a Christian reason to give it tone, to lend it steadiness." Here is a *use* to which dogmas can be put. Cf. H. Bois, *Le Dogme Grec*, p. 34, and his criticism in *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 23 sq.: "M. Sabatier's affirmation comes to this obvious assertion: religion, if it is not known, will not be known. But of what advantage is it to this life itself to be known?" etc.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 445, and cf. H. Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 215 and note.

come to us eras of faith, and periods of doctrinal stability—which we have hitherto called ages of faith—will seem to us to be times of deadness in religion.

It is of the greatest importance for us, however, to observe that these results are not dependent on M. Sabatier's theory of evolution in religion. That theory serves only to introduce order into the variations of doctrine consequent on the multiform activities of religious life: to postulate for them a goal, and to lay down for them a course through history. The results in question are the direct outgrowth of the fundamental postulate of the whole school of thought of which M. Sabatier is so brilliant a representative, and must follow from its principle that life proceeds and determines doctrine, when proclaimed in the exclusive sense in which this school of thought proclaims it, independently of all further hypotheses which individuals may call in to complete their world-view. For if we are to define religion in this exclusive sense as a feeling, and to define Christianity as a religion in terms of the religious feeling alone, we have certainly identified Christianity with the religious sentiment, and have failed to institute any essential distinction between it and other religions, the products like it of the religious sentiment. The most that could be said on this ground, would be that in what we call Christianity the religious feeling first comes to its rights, and for the first time expresses itself fully and freely in accordance with its truth. But even so,

Christianity is represented as essentially one with all other religions, differing from them only as the perfect differs from the imperfect. All religions at once take their places as relatively true: they stand no longer in opposition to Christianity, as the false to the true, but in a hierarchy of relatively partial or complete. And above all, we lack all ground from this standpoint for declaring that in Christianity the religious feeling has at length succeeded in producing her perfect work: it may be as yet her masterpiece; but what is to assure us that in the coming ages there may not spring out of her depths some consummate flower of religion as much surpassing Christianity as Christianity surpasses Fetishism? On this postulate, we cannot get beyond the judgment that Christianity is the purest and truest product of the religious feeling as yet known to us. Now, no one doubts, of course, that religion is, among other things, a feeling: nor need we doubt that the implications of this feeling if fully drawn out and stated would give us a theology,—and a theology, let us say it frankly at once, which would be true, and would enter into Christianity as the fundamental element of its doctrinal system. And no one doubts that Christianity, as a religion, is also, among other things, a feeling—a specific form which the religious feeling common to all men takes: or that, if the implication of this specific form of religious feeling which Christianity is were all brought out and stated, we should have a specifically Christian theology. But the very enunciation of these facts involves recognising

that behind the specific form of religious feeling which Christianity is, there are implications which are not common to it and other forms of religious feeling, and which have determined the religious feeling into this specific form. It might be conceivable that these implications should come to our knowledge only subsequently to Christianity, and as a result of an analysis of the Christian phenomena; but in the order of thought and of nature they are in any case precedent to Christianity and the producing causes of the specific form which the religious feeling takes in it.

Now, the pressing question is, What produces the specific form of the religious feeling which is distinctive of Christianity? Why is it that the Christian man feels, religiously speaking, specifically differently from the Buddhist, the Shamanist, the Fetish-worshipper? The old answer was that the difference in the form which the religious sentiment takes in the diverse religions arises from the difference in the religious conceptions characteristic of these religions; and we do not see that any better answer has been or can be offered. There is something that is common to all religions, and this common element arises from the action of the religious nature of man: it suffices to prompt to a religion, and it will secure that man, so long as he remains man, will remain a religious being, accessible to religious ideas and to religious training. What, however, is distinctive of the several religions arises from differences between them in religious

conceptions, which mould and direct the action of the religious feeling into this channel or that. If this be so, a religion independent of conceptions, "dogmas," would be confined to a religion of nature, and could possess nothing not common to all religions; and to proclaim Christianity independent of doctrine would be simply to cast off distinctive Christianity and revert to the fundamental natural religion. The only way in which Christianity is distinguished from other religions is through the different religious conceptions which animate it and which form for it a specific type of religious experience and religious life. But if this is so, then it is not true that life precedes doctrine in the sense intended by this school of thought: doctrine precedes life, and is the cause of the specific form which the religious life takes in Christianity, that is, of distinctive Christianity itself. To be indifferent to this doctrine, as if it were only an index of the life flowing on steadily beneath it and independently of it, is therefore to be indifferent to distinctive Christianity itself.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there is a sense less exclusive than that in which the school of thought at present under discussion uses the phrase, in which it is true that life precedes doctrine. We not only have no desire to deny, we rather wish to proclaim, the great truth involved in the watchword of the greatest of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Prof. Orr's remarks on the relation of ideas to religion, *Christian View*, etc., pp. 18 sq.

fathers<sup>1</sup> and schoolmen, *Credo ut intelligam*, and adopted by the Reformers in the maxim of *Fides precedit rationem*, and before the Reformers or schoolmen or fathers, proclaimed by Paul in the immortal words that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them because they are spiritually judged" (1 Cor. ii. 14). None but the Christian man can understand Christian truth; none but the Christian man is competent to state Christian doctrine. There is a low ground on which this obvious proposition may be defended, which even Aristotle was able to formulate: ἕκαστος κρίνει καλῶς ἃ γίνωσκει, καὶ τούτων ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸς κριτῆς· καθ' ἕκαστον ἄρα ὁ πεπαιδευμένος, ἀπλῶς δ' ὁ περὶ πάντων πεπαιδευμένος. But Paul has taught the Christian a much higher doctrine. It is only through the guidance of the Holy Ghost, dwelling within us, that we can reach to the apprehension of the deep things of God. Were this all that were meant by the assertion that life must precede doctrine, we would give it our heartiest assent. And so far as this assertion may be thought to mean that doctrine alone cannot produce life, we would welcome it, as has already been said, with acclamations. There is no creative power in doctrines, however true; and they will pass over dead souls,

<sup>1</sup> Animus humanus, nisi per fidem donum spiritus hauserit, habebit quidem naturam Deum intelligendi sed lumen scientiæ non habebit" (Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, ii. 34). "Sic accipite, sic credite, ut mereamini intelligere: fides enim debet præcedere intellectum, ut sit intellectus fidei præmium" (Augustine, *Sermones de verb Dom.*).



leaving them as inert as they found them: it is the *Creator Spiritus* alone who is competent to quicken dead souls into life; and without Him there has never been, and never will be, one spark of life produced by all the doctrines in the world. But this is not what is intended by the watchword that life precedes doctrine. What is meant by it is that the Christian life blooms and flourishes wholly independently of Christian conceptions, and that it is indifferent to the Christian life whether these conceptions—however fundamental—are known or not. Against this we protest with all the energy possible, and pronounce its proclamation a blow at distinctive Christianity itself. We fully accord, therefore, with M. Bois' strong words: <sup>1</sup>—

“We conclude, then, that in religion the idea precedes life, knowledge precedes feeling (which does not at all prevent a certain knowledge following life). Even if we admit that it is feeling which constitutes the essence of religion—a feeling of dependence, of love or of fear—it is still necessary for the feeling, no matter what it is, to have an object, known and thought. We are not able to love or fear what we have no knowledge of. We are not able to love what we do not think worthy of love, nor to fear what we do not think an occasion of fear. We are not able to feel dependent on something of whose existence we are ignorant. If religion is a feeling, this feeling supposes a certain knowledge which explains and justifies it; it is illusory and is condemned as such by conscience and reason, which command us to repel it and to eliminate it, if it has no object or if its object is not known. To make religion a feeling without precedent knowledge is to make it an illusion or a disease: its history is no more than the history of an illusion or of a disease, and the science which can be made of it is only a section of mental pathology.

“But this is not all. We refuse to make religion consist solely and essentially in a feeling. . . . Thought is not an epiphenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bois, *De la Connaissance Religieuse*, p. 31.

superadded to piety ; it forms an integral part of it. Doctrines are not something external and posterior to religion : they are an essential element of it. . . . Intellect and will have part in religion as well as feeling<sup>1</sup>—all the human faculties concur in it. . . . Without conscious ideas there might be obscure feeling, blind passion, fatalism, magic, all you wish : there would not be either morality or religion. Should there be emotions and feelings without ideas, those feelings and emotions would be neither moral nor religious.”

But in proportion as we allow that feeling without a known object is blind and meaningless to us—and would be suggestive of disease rather than of the divine—in that proportion we give a place to doctrine at the root of religion, and to Christian doctrine at the root of the Christian religion. As is the underlying conception, so, then, is the feeling : and it becomes of the first importance for the Christian man rightly to conceive these fundamental ideas which give form and direction to the life. The right conception of these ideas it is the task of Systematic Theology to investigate and secure : and thus the right and function of Systematic Theology is already vindicated.

It will add greatly to the confidence with which we recognise this fundamental place of Christian truth with reference to Christian life, to remind ourselves

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. Ladd's definition of religion : “Religion, subjectively considered, may be defined as an attitude of mind—intellect, feeling, and will—towards Other Being, on which I recognise my dependence for my being and my well-being, and to which I feel myself somehow responsible in the way of control” (*The New World*, Sept. 1895, p. 415). So also Prof. Laidlaw (*The Bible Doctrine of Man*, ed. 2, p. 130) : “It is evident, on a general review of the facts, that we cannot assign religion to any single faculty or power in man as its exclusive function. The intellect, the affections, and the will are seen to be all concerned in it.” He refers to Alliott's *Psychology and Theology*, pp. 54-59, for good remarks on the subject.

that such was evidently the conception of the founders of the Christian religion concerning the relations of doctrine and life. This fact is written large over the Epistles of Paul, for example, by the very distribution he makes of his matter: it is ever first the doctrine and then the life with him. The transition at the opening of the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a typical example of his practice in this regard. Eleven chapters of doctrinal exposition had preceded; five chapters of precepts are to succeed: and he passes from the one to the other with what has been called his "tremendous therefore": "I beseech you *therefore*, brethren"—"therefore," because all this is so. In these "tremendous therefores" is revealed Paul's conception of the relation between truth and life. The same conception, it need scarcely be said, was that of his Master before him. How much Jesus makes of the Father's Word which had been given to Him and which He had given to His followers, that they might know the truth and have eternal life, and that His joy might be fulfilled in them! His prayer for them was that they might be sanctified by the truth which God's Word was. There is, of course, clear recognition that faith rests upon a moral basis and is not to be compelled by the mere exhibition of truth. Gregory of Nazianzen did not go beyond the teaching of the founders of Christianity in his prescription how to become a theologian: "Keep the commandments; conduct is the ladder to theory—*πρᾶξις ἐπίβασις θεωρίας.*" Our Lord Himself

declared, "If any one willeth to do the will of Him that sent Me, he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself,"—that is, it is only in the good ground of a good heart that even the good seed of the gospel can produce fruit. But nowhere did He or any of His apostles ever teach that the good seed is unnecessary for the harvest—that the unsowed soil, however good, is competent of itself to produce the golden return. Knowledge of God's will with them was ever the condition of doing God's will, and lay at the root of all good conduct and true religion in the world.

And from that day to this, this has been the fundamental conception of the Christian religion among its adherents. The meaning of this is delightfully set forth at the opening of that eloquent book, Dr. James Macgregor's *The Apology of the Christian Religion*. Other religions have sought to propagate themselves in various ways, but this is what is characteristic and peculiar to Christianity: it made its appeal from the first to men's reasons.<sup>1</sup>

"No other religion," says Dr. Macgregor, "has ever seriously set itself . . . to *reason* the sinful world out of worldliness into godli-

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<sup>1</sup> Compare also Dr. James Orr's remarks, *The Christian View*, etc., p. 23: "If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions the doctrinal element is at a minimum, the chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions—it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions."

ness. The aspect of the new religion thus appearing towards the freedom of the human soul, in addressing itself to the reason in order to reach the man in his conscience and his heart, struck the intelligent heathens as a presumptive evidence of truth and divinity, since reason is 'the door' (John x. 1 *sq.*)—the *lawful* way—of seeking to win and to control the manhood. And that aspect was given to the religion from the beginning by the author of it."

Christianity has thus from the beginning ever come to men as the rational religion, making its appeal primarily to the intellect. It has thus ever evinced itself not merely, as Dr. Macgregor puts it, pre-eminently as the apologetical religion, but also pre-eminently as the doctrinal religion. Above all other religions, it consists in doctrines; it has truth to offer to men's acceptance, and by their acceptance of this truth it seeks to rule their lives and save their souls.<sup>1</sup>

How else, indeed, would it propagate itself in the world? We may speak of "spiritual contagion" and of the hidden work of the Spirit of God in the heart; and each phrase enshrines a precious fact without which Christianity could not live in the world. Christianity does propagate itself from soul to soul, as the prairie fire leaps from spear to spear of the tall

<sup>1</sup> It is probably, then, not mere accident that in Rom. vii. 23 it is from the *νοῦς*—the "mind"—that the conquest of Christianity over the life proceeds outwardly to the members. Christianity makes its appeal to the "mind" and secures the affection of the "inward man" first, and thence advances to victory over the "flesh" and "members." Accordingly it is by the "renewing of their mind (*τοῦ νοῦς*)" that sinners are to be so metamorphosed as to be no longer fashioned according to the world, but to prove the will of God (Rom. xii. 2). Compare the rich expressions of Eph. iv. 18–24. The noëtic root of salvation is continually insisted on in the Scriptures.

grass : our Lord Himself tells us that the seed are the children of the kingdom. And all the religious life in the world is the creation of the Spirit of God : the kingdom of God is like leaven hidden in the meal, and works silently and unobservedly from within till the whole mass is leavened. But the commission that the Master has given us was not to depend on "spiritual contagion," but to sow the seed which is the Word of God : nor has He promised that the Spirit should work His wonders of grace apart from that Word. The commission is, *Go, preach* : and the promise is to him that *heareth and obeyeth*. Are we, after all, to suppose that this great duty laid on His followers is a mere "spiritual exercise" of no value beyond themselves—a kind of spiritual gymnastics for the manifestation and strengthening of their own faith? Is the foolishness of preaching after all a useless evil, inflicted on men? Was Paul mistaken when he declared that Christ had sent him forth above all to preach the gospel? We may think as we will ; but it is very evident that the founders of Christianity earnestly believed, not that the so-called Word of God is the product of faith and its only use is to witness to the faith that lies behind it and gives it birth, but that the veritable Word of God is the seed of faith, that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, or, in other words, that behind the Christian life stands the doctrine of Christ, intelligently believed. When, for example, the apostle asks the Galatians, "This only would I learn of you,

Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" he intimates with entire distinctness that it is in connection with the truth of God offered to faith that the Holy Spirit is given; and therefore elsewhere, although the gospel is naught save as it is attended with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power—and Paul may plant and Apollos may water in vain if God do not Himself give the increase—yet this very gospel itself and its preaching is called the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 24).

In insisting, therefore, on the primacy of Christian doctrine, and on the consequent right and duty to ascertain and accurately to state this doctrine—which is the task of Systematic Theology—we have the consciousness of being imitators of Paul even as he was of Christ. How much the apostle made, not merely of the value of doctrine as the condition of life, but of the importance of sound doctrine! His boast, we will remember, is that he is not of the many who corrupt the truth, but that he, at least, has preached the whole counsel of God. He is not content that Jesus Christ should be preached, but insists on a special doctrine of Christ—Jesus Christ and Him as crucified. He even pronounces those that preach any other gospel than that he preached accursed: and we should carefully note that this curse falls not on teachers of other religions, but on preachers of what we might speak of to-day as different forms of Christianity. In a word, in all his teaching and in all his

practice alike, Paul impresses upon us the duty and the supreme importance of preserving that purity of doctrine which it is the aim of Systematic Theology in its investigation into Christian truth to secure.

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*γνώσσετε τὴν ἀληθείαν, καὶ  
ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς*

St. JOHN viii. 32

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.—Introductory. CHAPTER II.—The Spiritual and Moral Tone of the Prophets. CHAPTER III.—The Predictive Element of Prophecy: its Nature and its Limitations. CHAPTER IV.—Methods of Interpreting Prophecy. CHAPTER V.—The Material Elements of the Messianic Hope. CHAPTER VI.—The Religious Aspect of the Messianic Hope. CHAPTER VII.—The Messianic King. CHAPTER VIII.—The Prophetic and Priestly Aspects of the Messiah. CHAPTER IX.—The Atoning Victim. CHAPTER X.—The Fulfilment of Prophecy in Christianity. CHAPTER XI.—Progressive Christianity the most Perfect Fulfilment of Jewish Prophecy. CHAPTER XII.—The Practical Value of Prophecy as an Aid to Christian Faith.

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