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THE REFORMED FAITH

To describe the Reformed Faith in the limits of an article is no easy task. Any adequate account of it would require an exposition of the historical theological situation out of which it arose, and the theological views which it opposed. This in itself would be a task requiring too much space for an article in a theological Review.

The mysticism which misunderstood the nature of revelation and minimised or destroyed the authority of the Word of God as the *principium* of theological knowledge; the sacramentarianism and sacerdotalism of the Church of Rome, which denied the immediacy of the relation of the sinner to God in Salvation; the obscuration of the Augustinian conception of sovereign grace—all these theological movements would demand a somewhat lengthy consideration in order to reach an adequate understanding of the essential nature of the Reformed Faith. Obviously we must content ourselves with the mention of these theological errors which the Reformers opposed, and which met their most radical opposition in the Reformed Reformation.

But if our task is not easy, it is, nevertheless timely and important. In this connection we would call attention to some trenchant words of Karl Barth[1] in his Address, "Reformed Doctrine, its Nature and Task." He quotes from an account of the proceedings of a meeting of the eastern section of the Reformed World-Alliance held in Zurich in 1923. The words he quotes, he says, are from the pen of one of the leaders of that meeting. They are as follows: "It could not escape an attentive observer, what a small rôle unfruitful theological discussions played in these days (i.e., of the meeting). The Conference was impelled by a strong spiritual endeavour to grasp the old truths of the Reformation as far as possible untheologically and to let them become vital in their religious significance for the present time, and with this turning back to the old sacred inheritance, at the same time to be guided by a spirit of resolute determination, which presses forward and will test the old truths practically in new relations." Remarking on these words, Barth

[1] Karl Barth, *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, Address entitled: Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und ihre Aufgabe, §§. 179 ff.

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says that it was no thankful task which was laid upon him at Emden, later, in 1923, to speak about the Reformed doctrine, theology, and preaching,—the very things which were to be shoved into the background at Zurich. When he asks, why there was to be silence on these matters, "as far as possible," he states these reasons which we believe are operative in England, Scotland, and America, as well as in Germany and Switzerland. First, because in Protestantism, and among Protestant theologians, the opinion is ever on the increase that doctrine is less weighty than life. The concepts "theological" and "unfruitful" appear to many as closely akin, and the question as to the true content of preaching less important than all manner of ecclesiastical reforms and programmes. Second, because the question of true doctrine is not favourable to the widespread desire for union and unionistic "tactics" and "strategies." Third, and chiefly, because the question of true doctrine cannot be raised without disclosing the great embarrassment or dilemma of modern Protestantism. The low estimation of doctrine has, Barth remarks, the same ground as the judgment of the fox about the grapes. The modern Reformed Church seems to have no unitary grasp of its great doctrinal inheritance, so that to press forward to the practical application and propagation of the "old sacred inheritance" without a definite knowledge of what we are to propagate, and without a genuine conviction of its fundamental importance, seems truly a futile task. Is it so certain that in our Reformed Churches, the old truths of the Reformation are sounded from the pulpits and find echo in the pews? Are the changes and falsifications of the Reformed message so light that we can press forward with a good conscience to the practical tasks of the Reformed Church? The friends of an "untheological" Reformed position point with preference to the practical, unionistic tendencies of the Reformed fathers, especially the organising genius of Calvin, forgetting entirely that Calvin first wrote his Institutes, and then his much admired ecclesiastical letters, or, in Barth's words, Calvin "first had a theme and then thought on its variation, first knew what he willed and then willed what he knew." To reverse this order "with resolute determination," to begin where Calvin left off, is to turn things upside down, to wish to reap with Calvin without having sowed with him. The Reformation of Zwingli began with sermons, that of Calvin with theological lectures.

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These, we think, are true words and much needed to-day. And are not the causes of our doctrinal indifference in English-speaking lands much the same as those here cited with reference to Germany and Switzerland?

It is, however, an important task to seek to describe briefly the Reformed Faith.

In the limits of this article we must necessarily confine ourselves to the attempt to single out what we regard as the essential features of the Reformed Faith. And, even when we so limit our task, we meet with apparent divergent views. Of older writers, to mention only a few names, Goebel, Schneckenburger, and Schweizer have sought to define it chiefly from the point of view of its distinction from Lutheranism.[2] In recent times, B. B. Warfield[3] distinguishes between its distinctive differences and its formative principle, finding the latter in the vision of God in his Majesty. But if we are to single out "material principles," or principles of "content," we should add, the realisation of our absolute dependence upon God, and the immediacy of the relation of the soul to God and to God's Grace.

More recently Karl Barth[4] has asserted that the essence of the Reformed Faith is not to be found in one doctrine singled out from others, nor in a series of doctrines, but points to one characteristic point—the source of all others. It is, he says, known in Church history as the Scripture *Principium*. At the beginning of the Reformed Church stands the idea that the truth is in the Word of God alone, that the Word of God is contained in the writings of the Old and New Testaments, and that all doctrine finds its norm of truth in the Scripture as the Word of God. It is not, he thinks, the essence of the Reformed Faith to say that the idea of God, or the sovereignty of God, or the *soli deo gloria*, is the fundamental point. Above all stands the more fundamental fact that God Himself speaks in this Word. And this is not a so-called "formal principle"; it is *the* principle of "content" or "meaning," the "material principle" of the Reformed Church.[5]

[2] Goebel, *Die religiöse Eigenthümlichkeit der lutherischen und der reformierten Kirche*; Schneckenburger, *Vergleichende Darstellung des lutherischen und reformierten Lehrbegriffes*; Schweizer, *Centraldogmen u.s.w.* For a thorough discussion of all views cf.: Voigt, *Fundamental Dogmatik*, §§. 397-480.

[3] *Calvinism To-day.* Three Addresses in Commemoration of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of John Calvin. Article, Calvinism, New Schaff, Herzog Encyclopedia.

[4] Karl Barth, Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und Aufgabe, Aufsatz in Barth's *Wort Gottes und Theologie*, cf. especially p. 193.

[5] We are not now concerned with the discussion of Barth's view of the Word of God which he has more recently developed in his *Dogmatik*. Nor do we agree with Barth that historical criticism

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But Barth's assertion that the fundamental idea of the Reformed Faith is to be found in the idea that God himself speaks in His Word, is really the result of a conception of God as infinitely transcendent and unknowable, so that any knowledge of God must come to man from God himself. Barth, however, differs from Calvin and the classic representatives of Reformed Theology in that the latter recognise a *notitia Dei insita*[6] which, through reason and conscience, becomes a *notitia acquisita*, and the reason of man teaches him to see God manifest in the world.[7] This knowledge, it is true, Calvin and the following Reformed Theology believed never results in any adequate knowledge of God even as Creator because man is blinded by sin. Whereas in Barth the idea of Redemption so swallows up that of Creation, that all knowledge of God is through the Word of God, the Logos become man, and God is hidden in this first form of His Word, as well as in the Bible which bears witness to this primary form of the Word of God.[8]

We are not concerned here to discuss the differences between Barth's dialectic and the classic Reformed Faith. We wish simply to point to the fact, that there is a fundamental difference, and that Barth's assertion that the essence of the Reformed Faith is that God speaks in His Word can be traced back to his idea of the transcendence of God. Likewise, when the old Reformed Theology speaks of a "natural religion" or "natural theology," it is quite clear that this was not regarded as an investigation of God by the human reason, but that the innate knowledge of God and the knowledge of God in His works was regarded as a self-revelation of God to man.[9]

While, therefore, it is obvious that the idea of Revelation, and the Scripture principle of knowledge are essential in the Reformed Faith, and must, we believe, be added to the idea of the Majesty of God, emphasised by B. B. Warfield, it is only by a combination of both ideas that we can derive a general idea of the

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may show that the Old Testament religion is the product of some Asiatic folk-religion, and the New Testament religion the product of a syncretistic development of the Greek mysteries, and that Bultmann's extreme sceptical historico-critical point of view may be conceded, without in any way affecting the truth that the Bible is a revelation from God. This is not the old Reformed doctrine, and to this we do not consent. We are simply citing Barth's view as to the essence of the Reformed Faith.

[6] Calvin: Institutes I, III, 1.

[7] Calvin, I., V. 1.

[8] Barth, *Dogmatik*, Kap. I, § 4.

[9] Cf. Kuyper: Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology, Div. III., Chapter II. On the *Principium* of Theology; see also the chapters on Revelation in Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. I.

nature of the Reformed Faith in its difference from Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Modern theology from Schleiermacher to Troeltsch.

It is, as we have indicated, chiefly in its distinction from Lutheranism that the attempt has been made to set forth the distinctive features of the Reformed Faith since Max Goebel published his book, already referred to, "The Religious Peculiarity of the Lutheran and Reformed Church." To review the discussions of Goebel, Ullmann, Semisch, Ebrard, Kahnis, Nitzsch, Schneckenburger, Baur, and Voigt, would lead us far beyond the limits of our space. There is a real difference between the Lutheran and Reformed theology, but it is a mistake to find it in any external or psychological, or geographical circumstances. Neither Zwingli's tendency to intellectualism, not the humanistic culture of Zwingli and Calvin, nor the democratic character of South Germany and Switzerland, will explain the distinctive features of the Reformed Confession. We must seek its distinctive marks in its formative principle, as Warfield and more recently, Barth, have done. And we believe that we must combine their views. Barth, as we have seen, sees the formative principle of Reformed thought in the Scripture principle of knowledge. Warfield finds it in the recognition of the Majesty of God, and finds that this idea works itself out in three essential features. In Reformed thought pure theism comes to its rights. The course of the development of the world, and its history, results from the purpose and plan of God as Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the Universe. Religion is found in its highest conception as absolute dependence upon God in all the relations of thought and life. Evangelicalism is proclaimed in its most consistent form in the doctrine of Sovereign Grace or the absolute dependence of the sinful soul on God's Sovereign Grace alone for Salvation.

Adding to these features the one emphasised by Karl Barth, we may add, the absolute dependence of man on God's Word and Spirit for our knowledge of God.

The difference, then, between the Reformed Faith and other types of Christian thought is a difference of degree rather than of kind. Its dependence on, and working out of, the Scripture principle is more radical and consistent than is the case with Roman Catholicism or Lutheranism, though both the latter acknowledge the authority of Scripture. Nor is the

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Reformed Faith a specific variety of theism, religion, and evangelicalism over against other varieties of equal truth. It differs from other types of Christian thought, as Warfield remarks,[10] not as one species differs from another, but as the perfectly developed representative of one species differs from an imperfectly developed one. There is only one kind of pure theism, religion and evangelicalism, and the several types laying claim to these names differ as more or less perfect examples of the same species. The Reformed Faith, therefore, conceives itself, as the most pure Biblicalism, theism, religion, and evangelicalism. Whoever believes in God fully, and in our absolute dependence upon Him, for knowledge, life and salvation, is implicitly an adherent of the Reformed Faith.

These formative principles, then, are the causes of the differences of the Reformed Faith from other types of the Christian Faith. It can scarcely be said, as has often been claimed, that the Reformed Theology is characterised by its emphasis on the doctrine of Predestination, and Lutheranism by its doctrine of Justification by faith. The doctrine of predestination springs from pure theism in Zwingli, and is the consequence of our absolute dependence on God's Saving Grace in Calvin. But it was characteristic of the whole Reformation movement in the beginning; indeed, the whole Reformation movement, theologically speaking, was simply a revival of Augustinianism. Zwingli and Calvin did not surpass Luther in this respect,[11] and Melanchton gave this truth a formal place in his first statement of the Protestant Faith.[12] Nor did the Reformed theologians neglect or minimise the doctrine of Justification by faith. Luther was overwhelmed by a sense of guilt and found peace in God's justifying act. The Reformed theology, however, conceives of Justification as a part of the whole redemptive scheme with its end not simply man's salvation, but the glory of God the Redeemer.

Above all else, the Reformed Faith is opposed to every kind of scheme of self-salvation. God *alone* is the Saviour of the sinner. This is the root of Reformed Soteriology, and it is simply because of this deep sense of helplessness and profound consciousness of free grace in Salvation that the doctrine of sovereign election was developed.

[10] Warfield. Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, II, p. 360.
[11] Luther: On the Bondage of the Will.
[12] Cf. Voigt, *Fundamental Dogmatik*, pp. 469, 470.

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We have space only to speak briefly on these fundamental principles of the Reformed Faith.

1. The Scripture Principle. Every science to be a science must have its own *principium* of knowledge, and this principle of knowledge is not simply the source but the norm of truth. The ultimate authority which binds us to truth or compels our assent must be either in the fundamental intuitions of the mind, or in the deductions of reasoning, or in testimony. The latter obviously is the source and ground of the greater part of our knowledge. In all sciences dealing with the phenomena of the finite Universe, the *principium* of knowledge is the reason. But since theology has to do with the knowledge of God, and since God is a transcendent object, theology must have a special *principium* of its own. If there is to be any knowledge of God, He must make Himself known. Revelation, therefore, is the *principium* of knowledge in theology. Whether in general or special revelation the action goes out from God who is the *principium essendi* and whose self-revelation is the *principium cognoscendi* of theology. But since man's mind is darkened by sin, the Holy Scriptures, as Calvin showed,[13] are the source and norm of our knowledge of God, or, in later language, the *principium* of knowledge in theology, and with Calvin all the following Reformed theologians agreed.[14] The testimony of God is the most ultimate authority conceivable, and the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are declared by the Reformed Confessions and theologians to be the Word of God, and the *only* Word of God, to be our rule of faith and practice. By Romanists the Word of God is found in Scripture and in tradition ascertained and interpreted by the Church through its infallible Bishops and the Pope. In modern theology this authority is conceded to the Word of God as constituting one element in Scripture ascertained by the Christian consciousness, except in those theologians who have rejected any external authority whatsoever. But by Protestants and pre-eminently by the Reformed Churches, as is witnessed by their Confessions and the whole body of their classical theological literature, the

[13] Calvin: Institutes, I, 1 §6. Calvin taught that Scripture comes by revelation from God. It is true, as O. Ritschl points out against Heppe, that Calvin taught the inspiration of Scripture, but the fundamental ground of the authority of Scripture lies in the fact that God *spake* to Prophets: i.e., revelation, cf. Institutes, IV, chapter 8, §3.

[14] See for a few examples Hyperius, *Methodi theologiae*, etc., p. 24; Lasky, *Opera*, I, p. 412; Musculus, *Loci communes theologiae sacrae*, pp. 174-177.

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Scriptures themselves are declared to be the Word of God. It is true that a distinction was made between the Revelation of God made to the Prophets and its committal to writing, but for us men of the present age it is the Bible which is God's Word written.[15] The precise doctrine, then, of the Reformed Churches is that the whole Bible is the Word of God and as such the ultimate norm of truth in theological knowledge. The standards of the Presbyterian Church and other Reformed Confessions, use both phrases "The Scriptures are the Word of God" and "The Scriptures contain the Word of God." But, as A. A. Hodge remarks,[16] this is perfectly consistent as long as the stronger phrase is allowed its full meaning, because it obviously includes the weaker.

It is, then, an essential doctrine of the Reformed Churches that the whole Bible is the Word of God. All the contents of the Bible are not of the same dignity or value as a means of Grace. Some of their contents utter the Word of God to the Church in the Old Dispensation and under conditions now past. Some parts of the Bible are subordinate in importance to others, but God's Word is one, and it is a characteristic of the Reformed doctrine that all differences, such as those between the Old and New Testaments, or between the Law, the Prophets, and the Apostles, or between parts which do not awaken in us a "religious experience" and those which do, or Luther's emphasis on that which in the Bible deals with Christ (*Christum treibet*), have no principial significance accorded them in the Reformed Faith. At this point the Reformed fathers did not approve of Luther's attitude and did not hesitate to speak their mind.[17]

To show that this is the doctrine of the Reformed Church from the writings of all the Reformed theologians would be a task which would far exceed our space. It can readily be shown to be the doctrine of the Reformed Confessions. In contradistinction to the Lutheran Symbols, which for the most part do not begin with a statement of the Scripture principle, the Reformed Confessions, with few exceptions, begin by affirming the divine authority of Scripture.[18] The first Helvetic Confession

[15] Calvin: Institutes, I, chapter 6 §2.

[16] A. A. Hodge: The Authority of the Holy Scriptures, p. 3.

[17] *Zürcher Bekenntnis*, cf. 1545, in Karl Müller, *Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, 155. Compare the remarks of Karl Barth, Das Schriftprinzip der Reformierten Kirche, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1925, Heft 3, §. 223.

[18] For the Reformed Confessions consult E. F. K. Müller: Die *Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*; Schaff: *Creeds of Christendom*.

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was drawn up by Bullinger and others and signed by a number of Swiss Cantons prior to the influence of Calvin. In its first article, *De Scriptura Sacra*, it affirms, "Canonical Scripture is the Word of God conveyed by the Holy Spirit and set forth to the world by prophets and apostles." The second Helvetic Confession by Bullinger was adopted by a majority of Swiss Cantons in 1566, and subsequently by the Cantons, Neuchâtel and Basle, and by the Churches of Hungary in 1567, of Poland in 1571, and of Scotland in 1566. It states, "we believe and confess that the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments are the Word of God and have plenary authority of themselves and not from men. For God, who Himself spoke to the Fathers, Prophets and Apostles, also now speaks to us through the Holy Spirit." The Gallic Confession, drawn up by Calvin, and put in its present form by Chandieu in 1559, when it was adopted by the Synods of Paris, confirmed by twenty-nine national synods (1559-1659), and then by seven national synods of the "Church of the Wilderness" (1726-1763), says in article five: "secondly, God reveals Himself more clearly in His Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterwards committed to writing in books which we call the Holy Scriptures" . . ., "whence it follows that no authority whether of antiquity or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts of Councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated and reformed according to them." The Old Scotch Confession, compiled by John Knox and his compeers (1560), and the standard in Scotland till superseded by the Westminster Confession in 1688, says (Article 19), "the authority of the Scriptures of God is the authority of God, and neither depends on men nor angels." The Belgic Confession by De Bres (1561), adopted by local and national Synods, and by the Synod of Dort in 1619, and, with the Heidelberg Confession, the Standard of the Reformed Churches in Holland and Belgium and the Dutch Reformed Church in the U.S.A., says (Article 3), "We confess that the Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that afterwards, God, from a special care which He has for our salvation, commanded His servants the Prophets and Apostles to commit His revealed Word to writing." Article five: "We believe without any doubt all things contained therein." The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I., §1, says, "it pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare His will unto His Church; and afterwards to commit the same to writing." §8 "all which (Biblical books) are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life." Here inspiration is asserted as a quality of Scripture. Scripture is defined by inspiration, but inspiration is not defined, much less limited to, matters of faith and practice. Chapter I. §4, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God."

Obviously the principle asserted in the Reformed Confessions is that God speaks through the Scripture and therefore it is authoritative. This is the Reformed Principle of Scripture.

It may be said that the Lutheran branch of Protestantism asserted this principle also, and that it is not distinctive of the Reformed Church. In reply it should be said that while both Churches acknowledge the Divine authority of the Scripture, the Lutherans used it as a negative or regulative principle, and subordinated it to the so-called "material principle" of Justification by faith, while the Reformed used it as a positive and material principle, and applied the Scripture principle of authority much more radically than did the Lutherans. In the Reformed Theology we find no preference or placing at the centre any theological doctrine. It was not a single doctrine, such as Justification by faith alone and its denial by the Romish Church, nor was it the struggle of the heart for peace with God, which called forth the Reformed Reformation. It was rather the positive Scripture principle, the recognition of the Word of God as the unconditional, positive norm of Christian faith and life, or, as Goebel puts it, "striving for the glory of God through unconditional subjection to His Word as against all human commands."[19] We believe we are justified historically in thus stressing the Scripture principle of God's authority as the source of the knowledge of Himself as one of the characteristic marks and formative principles of the Reformed Faith.

[19] Göbel, op. cit., p. 70. Goebel has given abundant historical proof of the truth which we have asserted from the history of the Lutheran and reformed Churches, and from the writings of the theologians, and the Confessions of both branches of Protestantism.

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The grounds of belief in the Scripture as the Word of God in the Reformed Theology, we have not space to discuss. Briefly we would say that the Reformed Theologians, especially Calvin, held that God alone must witness to His revelation. The Reformed Theology asserted that God Himself speaks in the Scripture, and the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts, making us recognise God's voice in the Scripture. That the proposition that the Scripture is the Word of God, however, is like the proposition a = a i.e., something which can only be explicated, but not grounded, the view which Karl Barth maintains,[20] we cannot regard as justified, and that the Reformed doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit to the Bible does not destroy the necessity or use of Christian Apologetics we have sought to show in another place.[21] While it is true, therefore, that for the Reformed fathers, our belief that the Bible is the Word of God rests ultimately on the fact that God speaks in His Word, and witnesses to its truth in our hearts by the Spirit, we cannot agree with Barth and Thurneysen[22] that this theological judgment can be made, entirely independent of the question as to the historical origin of the Biblical revelation and the Biblical books. Barth claims that historical criticism can never prove and never refute the Church's affirmation that the Bible is the Word of God. Both he and Thurneysen rightly affirm that the Bible cannot claim exemption from historico-critical treatment. But we cannot agree with them that the results of such treatment are indifferent to faith. While it is true that historical criticism must deal with the Bible, it is not true, we believe, that the question of the origin of the Bible has nothing to do with its validity as God's Word. If, as Barth and Thurneysen are ready to allow, it can be shown that historical criticism can dissolve the Bible, regarding it as the literary remains of an Asiatic folks religion and the product of a cult religion of the Hellenistic epoch, then, we think, its nature as a supernatural and Divine revelation can no longer be maintained. The Bible is through and through

[20] Karl Barth, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1925, Heft 3, §§. 235 ff.

[21] C. W. Hodge: The Witness of the Holy Spirit to the Bible, *Princeton Theological Review*, 1913, pp. 41-84.

[22] Barth, op. cit., also his address: *Biblische Fragen, Einsichten, und Ausblicke*, in his volume *Wort Gottes und Theologie*. Eduard Thurneysen, Article, *Schrift und Offenbarung*, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, Heft 6, §§. 3-30.

We have made the above remarks as an expression of our conviction. It would take us far beyond the limits of this Article to give any adequate account of "The Theology of Crisis," or to compare it with the Reformed Faith in its classic expression, much less to justify adequately our above dissent from its views as to the Bible. All this would require a separate article.

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supernaturalistic and claims a supernaturalistic origin. If, then, we seek a naturalistic explanation of its origin under the presuppositions of a naturalistic philosophy diametrically opposed to the supernaturalistic philosophy of the Bible itself, our belief in the nature of the Bible as the Word of God comes into direct conflict with our belief as to the origin of the Biblical revelation, and no appeal to a " dialectic " philosophy of belief will enable us to escape the dilemma by simply affirming that the theological question as to the Bible begins only where the historical treatment of the Bible ends. We are well aware that Barth's dialectic is neither ontological nor logical, but "*existentiell*" i.e., involved in the act of faith. We know that he has complained of the accusation of violating the law of non-contradiction as a law of thought. But all this does not affect what we have just said. The Reformed fathers lived before the days of modern historical criticism, but had they lived to-day, it is our conviction that they would have insisted on a refutation of naturalistic criticism and not have turned their backs to it.

2. The Reformed Faith as the purest expression of Theism.

The Reformed Faith is the purest expression of Theism. Theism is the belief in an almighty and sovereign God, the Creator and Governor of the Universe, and the interpretation of the universe from the standpoint of God's purpose. And pure theism will let God be God, and is just the construction of all that happens in the physical and mental spheres as the unfolding of the eternal purpose of God, and the refusal to limit God either by the world of nature or the human will. And this is precisely the view of the Reformed Faith. Withdraw the acts of free agents from the purpose and control of God, under the false notion that an event cannot be free as to the mode of its occurrence and certain as to the fact of its futurition, then for the same reason you must also withdraw such acts from the foresight and providence of God which render them equally certain. The next step is to deny creation by this blind and helpless God, and one ends in the modern idea of a finite God. Your theism is gone, and the flood of naturalism sweeps away Christianity—the common Christianity of all branches of the historic Christian Church. Go the opposite way and merge God in the world-process, and you end in pantheism, and then the flood of naturalism not only overwhelms yourself, your religion, and your moral obligation, but God as well. To maintain theism, you

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must keep it pure and regard God as the almighty Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe, whose purpose and power are not limited. This is the Reformed Faith. This the essence of the Reformed idea of God and His relation to the world.[23]

The Reformed Faith welcomes all exposition and defence of Theism whether from Lutherans, Arminians, or theistic philosophers. It would never consent to claim to be the only theistic system of belief. What we assert is simply that in the Reformed conception of God and His relation to the world, theism comes to its rights and is expressed in its purest form, a form, therefore, which is the most capable of defence against all anti-theistic theories whether ancient or modern. Moreover, the whole history of the so-called "free-will" controversy shows clearly that in all systems of Christian belief, except the Reformed, God is limited in some respect either as to His purpose, will, or providence. It is not to be disputed, therefore, that all such systems constitute less pure forms of theism than that type of theism which finds expression in the Reformed Faith.

We live in an age when the authority of Scripture in matters of doctrine is being disputed on every hand; when either the "Christian consciousness," or some particular part or doctrine of Scripture selected under the influence of some philosophical principle, is being substituted for the principle of Scripture as the only rule of faith. But it would require considerable hardihood, in the light of modern scientific exegesis, to deny that the Reformed idea of God is the Biblical one. To anyone at all acquainted with the objections to Reformed Theology on this point, it must be quite evident that they are emotional or philosophical rather than exegetical, and as long as we hold to the Reformation principle of the sole authority of Scripture in matters of doctrine, the Reformed conception of God will stand as the result of God's self-revelation to man as contrasted with the human quest of God.

3. The Reformed Faith is the expression of pure religion at the height of its conception, and pure grace or consistent evangelicalism in "its pure and only stable expression," to use a phrase of the late B. B. Warfield. We have combined these third and fourth salient marks of the Reformed Faith because as a matter of fact man is a sinner, and his absolute dependence upon God, which is the essence of pure religion, must take the form

[23] Cf. Heppe: *Dogmatik der evangelischen reformierten Kirche*, Locus IV, VIII.

Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.

of absolute dependence upon God as Saviour. The Reformed Faith, then, is essentially absolute dependence on God in all the relations of thought and life. It will place no dependence on the human will; it is the very opposite of modern romanticism, and modern idealism, which asserts belief in the perfectibility of human nature through supposedly immanent divine potencies and by a process of evolution.

It refuses to regard God, after the Ritschlian manner, as merely our helper in our struggle against the world. Much less will it regard God as in need of us in His opposition to evil, as simply our leader in a common battle with evil and sin, after the fashion of the modern advocates, of the idea of a finite God. The Reformed Faith declares the *soli deo gloria*, and believes that the "chief end of man is to glorify God."

More especially, however, the Reformed Faith is characterised by the conception of pure grace or the absolute dependence of the sinner upon God for salvation. It is, in a word, pure evangelicalism. All the power exercised in man's salvation, the Reformed Faith ascribes to God alone, to His sovereign and irresistible grace. Only in this consistent form can evangelicalism be adequately defended against naturalism in the sphere of soteriology. Subtract from this pure evangelicalism in any degree, and you fall into the idea and attitude of dependence in some degree on human power and human merit for salvation. You are in unstable equilibrium between the Reformed Theology and a bald Pelagianism and modern naturalism, in which this relentless philosophy has now entered into the centre of your life and attacked the very ground of your hope of salvation for yourself and the world.

Once again, we repeat that the Reformed Faith welcomes the principle of evangelicalism in every system of Christian belief where it is found in any degree. It does, however, make the claim to be the only pure and consistent form of this evangelicalism. Over against the naturalistic auto-soterism of Modernism in every form, the Reformed Faith gladly allies itself with Lutheranism and evangelical Arminianism. But it cannot allow that these systems are consistently evangelical. Since, according to these views of soteriology, all the power of the Spirit of God in Salvation is common to all, or to all who hear the Gospel, it follows that they can become consistently evangelical only by becoming universalistic as to the result of the saving process, and can remain particularistic in this respect, and so Biblical, only by becoming unevangelical in so far as they make man's salvation to depend either on non-resistance of or co-operation with a common grace or operation of the Holy Spirit upon all alike. And, in so far as they do this, Lutheranism and evangelical Arminianism either become unevangelical, or impinge on pure evangelicalism which thus finds its only consistent expression in the Reformed Faith.

The Reformed Faith, then, is just pure Christian Supernaturalism at the height of its expression.

4. We raise the question, finally, as to what is the value and significance of the Reformed Faith for us to-day. We would answer in a word that in its pure expression of Biblical supernaturalism, the Reformed Faith provides the strongest ground of attack against the new theology.[24] What may be called the new theology is not a matter of date, but of principles. It is the result of an intellectual revolution going back to English Deism, the French Revolution, and the German Illumination. It is lacking in definiteness, it has no formal creed and no official representative. It has assumed a multitude of forms in Schleiermacher, Sabatier, Ritschl, and Troeltsch. If one looks at the attacks of the Ritschlians on the Hegelians, of the Radicals on the Liberals, of Loisy on Harnack, one might suppose that there are here fundamental differences. Differences there are, but they are not fundamental. There are common principles underlying the various forms of modern theology, and in each case they are diametrically opposed to the Reformed Faith.

Modern theology has no adequate sense of the majesty and transcendence of God. He is not distinct from the world, but only a name for the immanent law of the world; or of an ever present Spirit in the world; or the divine in man. In this respect the new theology is akin to paganism which, whether polytheistic or pantheistic, finds God only in the world.

In harmony with this low conception of God, and His relation to the world, is also the exalted idea which this theology has concerning the natural perfectibility of man, and its low view of sin. Man is naturally divine or destined to become so. He is not in a

[24] Cf. C. W. Hodge: The Significance of the Reformed Theology To-day. *Princeton Theological Review*, January, 1922.

Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.

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natural state of sin and redeemed by the supernatural grace and power of God. Man is by nature both natural and supernatural, we are told, i.e., the product of mere natural causes yet destined for an ethical end. In accordance with this view of man is also the view of man's religious knowledge. It is all of it psychologically mediated in origin and "supernatural" only in its religious purpose. Hence there is no real distinction between natural and supernatural revelation, and the Bible is not regarded as different from other religious books, but is subjected to a naturalistic reconstruction. It gives us no revealed truths; it simply nourishes the religious life, from which life doctrine is supposed to spring. Its uniqueness is found only in its spiritual content as the nourishment of religious life.

Furthermore, with its naturalistic idea of redemption, this theology needs no divine and supernatural Redeemer. Its low conception of God makes it easy to call Christ divine, for all men are divine in the same way. Christ is not God and man, but only God in man. And since this theology has no conception of the awful guilt of sin, all idea of expiation vanishes, and the Cross becomes only an illustration of the principle of all religious life. Instead of regeneration by the power of God, we have the false hope of the natural evolution of man, and his perfecting through adjustment to his environment and the improvement of the latter. Christianity is no longer a religion with tremendous issues of life and destiny in the future life, but is chiefly a religion for this present world, looking toward its social betterment.

This, in general outline, is the new theology. To understand the situation to-day with its "psychologism" and historical relativism, we must go back to Schleiermacher who is the theological representative of romantic idealism. The development of the exegetical and historical theological disciplines with their claim to scientific knowledge and their attitude of indifference or hostility to Dogmatics, led to a denial of the scientific character of the latter. The historical group of theological disciplines was supposed to be scientific and to have no practical motive; whereas Dogmatics was supposed to be merely practical and to have no scientific character. Hence Dogmatic Theology turned away from its *principium*, ceased to claim to set forth objectively revealed doctrines, and sought to expound the ideas implicated in Christian experience. It was this situation, as Troeltsch has

Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.

shown,[25] which led to an attempt to give a theoretical justification of this separation between the theological disciplines which had already taken place. This was done by means of an agnostic view of religious knowledge and a sharp separation between religious and scientific knowledge. This is a distinguishing mark of modern theology in contrast with the Reformation theology and Rationalism. But this conception of the practical and non-scientific character of religious knowledge did not stop until it had asserted the merely symbolical form of all doctrinal statements. It thus involved a complete scepticism as to valid theological truth, as, for example in the case of the *symbolofideisme* of Sabatier and Menégoz. Thus Dogmatic Theology assumes a merely practical character, and the ultimate scepticism of mysticism of this type is as inevitable as that of the more recent Pragmatism in America.

Schleiermacher attempted to connect the Christian consciousness with the historic Christ and to make room for the Christian revelation. Emil Brunner, however, has shown clearly that the *Reden* does not go beyond the sphere of natural religion, and that the famous eleventh paragraph of the *Glaubenslehre*, which relates the Christian consciousness to Christ, involves the dilemma that if we are to recognise a special revelation in the historical Christ, religion cannot be limited to mere feeling, but must involve revealed truth, whereas, on the contrary, if religion consists in mere feeling and religious knowledge springs from this, then the attempted connection of this consciousness with the historical Christ is impossible and we cannot get beyond the sphere of natural religion after all.[26]

In order to avoid this dilemma and to escape the danger of reducing Christianity to the natural religious sentiment, Ritschl sought to lay more emphasis on objective revelation through the historical Christ. In doing so, however, he aimed to keep Christianity independent of the results of historical criticism and free from all metaphysics. Accordingly, the Christ he had left was not the Christ of History, and the revelation which Ritschl claimed was only in the sphere of natural religion after all. His emphasis on the teaching of Jesus and the Apostolic

[25] E. Troeltsch, Rückblick auf ein halbes Jahrhundert der theologischen Wissenschaft in *Zeitscheift für wissenschaftliche Theologie*, Jahrgang 51, N. F. Heft, 2, p. 105. I have outlined this situation in the Address above cited on the *Princeton Theological Review*.

[26] Emil Brunner: *Der Mittler*, 1927, pp. 28 ff.

Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.

conception of Christianity was inconsistent with his fundamental principles. His opponents found in his theology more of Kant than of Luther, and the charge of rationalism which they brought against him in his day has been repeated by Brunner. Herrmann, Ritschl's most influential and consistent follower, regarded Christian faith simply as trust in God's providence induced by the impression which Jesus makes on the soul. All ideas about God and Christ, i.e., all Christian doctrines, are merely the way in which the Christian thinks about God and Christ—as a result of the impression which the so-called historical Jesus makes upon him. Theology, therefore, is after all a purely individual and subjective matter. More recent Ritschlians, as Stephan,[27] for example, though with certain modifications, have followed the line of thought marked out by Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Herrmann, and have not transcended their subjectivism.

While, therefore, the Ritschlian theology sought to be conservative, its conservatism is only apparent, not real. It sought to escape naturalism, but yielded to it by giving up as unessential to Christianity all that naturalism demanded. It asserted independence of historical criticism, yet used it to separate a human Jesus from supposedly unhistorical elements. It was determined by a naturalistic philosophy, and yet would isolate Christianity as the final religion.

The isolation of Christianity from other religions, and of Jesus from history, has long since been abandoned as a remnant of dogmatism in the group which followed the method of comparative religion in theology. The late Ernst Troeltsch was the systematic theologian of this school. A thorough application of the historical method to the problems of Dogmatics was demanded. Every historical fact is conceived as part of an uninterrupted evolution naturalistically conceived. Troeltsch speaks of an "inclusive supernaturalism" in contrast with the old "exclusive supernaturalism"; but by this he means only that God is to be found everywhere in history and nowhere in particular. The religion of Israel is connected with old oriental religious traditions; late Judaism from which Christianity is supposed to have sprung, is supposed to have been influenced by oriental and Greek thought, and New Testament Christianity is regarded as the product of a syncretistic religious evolution. Naturalism determines the whole procedure, and Troeltsch said that the application of

[27] H. Stephan: *Glaubenslehre*.

these principles rendered the uncertainty of the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels "a heavy burden." How is the Christ of Apostolic tradition related to the actual Jesus? To what extent in the Gospels do we have the dogma of Christ's followers? How did this dogma arise? The difference between the Johannine and the Synoptic tradition is rejected. The historical character of the so-called *Logia* is doubted. The sources which are supposed to underly the Synoptics are questioned as to their historical trustworthiness. The so-called historical Jesus is rendered difficult. Since the late war the historical scepticism of Wrede has been outdone by Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg[28] in his method of *Formgeschichte*, and we are left to choose between a divine Christ in a wholly mythical Gospel and the merely human Jesus of the old liberals in a Gospel which is supposed to be true only in so far as it has been desupernaturalised.

It is usually claimed that the old theology is in conflict with modern science, while the new theology is the product of modern scientific thought. But such is not the case. There is nothing in the ascertained results of the modern natural sciences which need cause such a theological revolution. It is only when natural science constructs a naturalistic view of the world, only when it fails to observe the limits of scientific knowledge—in a word—when it becomes unscientific, speculative, and dogmatic—that it can be claimed as the cause of the new theology. Nor is it the "evangelical conception of faith" which lies at the basis of the rejection of the authority of the Bible by this "new theology," which is already showing signs of becoming antiquated. It is, in a word, a naturalistic philosophy which demands this reconstruction of the Bible, and which sees revelation only in man's search for God rather than in God's self-revelation to men. By naturalism in this sense we do not mean the denial of teleology and the assertion that the mechanical view of the world is final. We mean the denial of the power of God to intrude in this world for man's salvation. This false philosophy is the real root of the so-called new theology.

How, then, we ask, can Christian theology meet this speculative philosophy which robs theology of its real object—God, and of its special *principium* of knowledge—the Bible as the Word of God?

Only two answers are possible. One is an appeal to the

[28] *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition. Jesus.*

Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.

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dialectic of Kierkegaard, i.e., by setting up a philosophy the precise opposite of that which underlies Modern Protestantism. In this way we can turn our backs to a naturalistic historical criticism of the Bible. It is this way which Karl Barth and his group have followed. Barth boldly asserts, as we have seen, that the results of historical criticism have nothing to do with the theological assertion that the Bible is the Word of God. Bultmann, likewise, the most sceptical of historical critics of the New Testament, has recently asserted that while his critical conclusions have made some of his friends "uncomfortable," he himself feels "absolutely comfortable" because he takes refuge in the dialectic of Barth, and believes that his historical conclusions have nothing to do with theology. But while we agree with Barth and his group in their polemic against the "psychologism" and "historical relativism" in which modern Protestant thought has ended, we cannot accept their method or conclusions, nor do we believe that they represent the true line of development from Calvin from which the Reformed theology of the seventeenth century is supposed to have departed. We are indeed sorry to have to leave this as a mere assertion. To give our reasons would require an entire article.[29] More particularly, we cannot believe that the historians can be left to dissolve the Biblical revelation as they have done, and that we can still claim that the Bible is the Word of God.

The second answer is that we must meet this destructive naturalistic philosophy by the assertion and defence of *Christian supernaturalism* which is the philosophy of the Bible itself. Doubtless our ultimate ground of belief will be the same as that

[29] Our objections to "The Theology of Crisis" would be, first, the opposition of the Infinite and the finite and the "crisis" or opposition of God to the world and man, appears to be grounded in a dualistic philosophy rather than in the fact of *sin*, as was the case with the old Reformed theology. It is true that these old theologians speak of sin and know the world only as a fallen one. But their idea of *Sin* is not the old Reformed view. Sin is a metaphysical as well as a moral evil. Hence the "oneness" (Einmaligkeit) of the Christian revelation would seem to lose its special *redemptive* significance, and the union of God and man once in the Incarnation which of course transcends reason would seem to be an "impossibility" not merely for human beliefs, but even for God. Secondly in accordance with this the idea of Redemption in this Theology seems to swallow up the idea of Creation, Providence, and Common Grace,—as well as the revelation of God in man and nature—all which ideas were prominent in the old Reformed Faith. Thirdly, as we have said in the text of this article, we do not believe that we can allow the most sceptical and naturalistic historical criticism to explain the origin of the Bible, and at the same time maintain that it is, nevertheless, the Word of God and a supernatural revelation of God to man "breaking into" this world, as this theology insists.

In a word, we do not believe that the world-view which underlies this theological movement is the world-view of the Bible itself, nor that Kierkegaard can be put in the same line with Jeremiah, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. It would, however, as we said, alone require an article or a series of articles to ground our dissent from "The Theology of Crisis" and it is hoped that it will be understood that we are not passing over a significant theological movement lightly, but are compelled by limits of space to be content with a mere mention of some of the major grounds of our dissent.

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of the Reformed fathers—that God speaks in His Word. Doubtless also we will find that all Apologetics is vain without the Witness of the Spirit in the sinner's heart which the Reformed Fathers emphasised. But according to the Reformed Fathers, the human reason is part of God's image in man, and though marred by sin, it must nevertheless judge of the credibility and evidence of Divine revelation.[30] Though God speaks to us and witnesses in us, He deals with us as rational beings. We have no more sympathy for the philosopher's talk about the "*gesunder Menschenverstand*" than has Barth, for it is not "*gesund.*" Nevertheless, under the Spirit of God, it is the only means we humans have of receiving a revelation from God, and we cannot for our part adopt the "*Irrationalismus*" which in various forms characterises the newest theological developments of various types.

But if we are to uphold pure supernaturalism, this can be done with effect only from the standpoint of pure theism which interprets all events as the unfolding of the purpose of God, and which sets no limits to His powers; of a pure religion which depends absolutely on God and rejects the Pelagian and naturalistic principle of dependence upon self; and of pure grace or pure evangelicalism or the assertion of our absolute dependence on God for salvation. This pure and consistent supernaturalism, we have tried to show, is just the essence of the Reformed Faith. In this, then, consists the tremendous significance and importance of the Reformed Faith to-day in this naturalistic age.

Doubtless this Reformed Faith is suffering a decline in the theological world to-day. What has been termed "Reformed spring-time in Germany" we cannot regard as the legitimate daughter of the classic Reformed Faith. In Scotland the names of William Cunningham and Thomas Crawford no longer exert the influence we wish they did. In America the influence of Charles Hodge, Robert Breckinridge, James Thornwell, Robert Dabney, William G. T. Shedd, and Benjamin Warfield, seems largely to have vanished. But though in theological circles and in ecclesiastical courts the leaders of Reformed thought find scant recognition, wherever humble souls catch the vision of God in His glory and bow in humility and adoration before Him, trusting for salvation only in His grace and power, there you have the essence of the Reformed Faith, and God in His

[30] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, chapter 3, §5.

providence may yet raise up a leader of religious thought who shall once again make the Reformed Faith a power in the theological world. If and when this happens we may confidently expect a true revival of religion in the Protestant world.

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Caspar Wistar Hodge [1830-1891], "The Reformed Faith," The Evangelical Quarterly 1.1 (1929): 3-24.