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## THREE PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

WHILE we are aware that this article gives little that is not known amongst us, we aim merely to emphasise and give sharper definition to that which originated and constitutes Reformed Theology. If we are not mistaken, there are just three main principles which underlie it all, according to which it is obtained and built up. These principles refer respectively to the *source* of our knowledge of God, to the *method of gaining its meaning*, and to its *orderly exhibition*. They are the principles of *Authority*; of *Interpretation*; and of *Dogmatic Construction*.

By a principle is meant that which dominates a specific conception of things and which carries in itself its own logical and necessary outcome. A principle acts as a driving force which runs its own inevitable course. Thus each principle constitutes a generic type which is definitely marked off from others. There can be no evolution of principles: it is each "after his kind." As they flow forth from definite conceptions resting in the very constitution of things, their number can be neither increased nor diminished. There actually obtain mixtures, but these confuse and deceive: they do not serve the truth. Hence it is unfair to proceed from one principle and to avail oneself of the fruits of another principle. Sharp definition and self-consistency serve the truth, and no true lover of the truth should fear to give expression to it as he verily believes it to be.

### I. THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY<sup>1</sup>

As is well known, there obtain three principles of religious authority: the Rationalist, the Romanist, and the Reformed; respectively depending upon the Reason, the voice of the Church, and the Word of God for its religious knowledge and guidance. Other representations are but varieties of these three.

No one will deny that God is the absolute authority. But *this* is the question: Has God spoken? Has He declared and revealed His will to mankind? Have we the record of it? These questions are answered in different ways according to the

<sup>1</sup> The content of this First Division is taken almost wholly from my book, *The Reformed Principle of Authority*.

principles of authority already noted. The Reformed answer : We should not know where to find revelation except in Holy Scripture. The Church can be a source of authority only in a *derivative* way ; it is the organisation which *exhibits* the knowledge of God (1 Timothy iii. 15). And the Reason is the instrument of the soul by which man apprehends and assimilates God's revelation.

The province and the competency of the Reason must be well understood. When we choose in favour of Scripture as our principle of knowledge as over against the Reason, we do not thereby abdicate the use of our mental faculties. We must not confuse the material and the formal aspects of the matter. The point at issue is this : The Rationalist (under which term the Modernist is to be classed) derives the *material* which he chooses to accept for his faith and conduct, *out of himself* ; whilst the Reformed theologian derives it from an *objective* source—from a revelation ; and he holds that Scripture is that revelation. The Reformed uses his reason to think about this revelation ; to construe and to assimilate it ; whilst the Modernist in greater or lesser degree, *manufactures* it, so to speak. He is subjective, for he determines by his own light and according to his own good pleasure what he judges ought to be truth. Bacon has well put it : "The rationalists are like spiders : they spin all out of their own bowels. But give me one who like the bee hath a middle faculty, gathering from abroad, and digesting that which is gathered by his own virtue." The Reformed believed in an objective revelation which man has not himself made nor formulated, but *he finds himself in the presence of it*, and, like the bee, he proceeds to make use of it. We do indeed make use of our reason as we pass on Scripture as the ground for our beliefs and practices, but we do this *in a secondary way* ; that is to say, the reason *per se* does not determine what is spiritual truth, but it deals with it, and according to its ability and disposition it rightly or wrongly estimates it. We mention our disposition also ; for in our deepest self we are either regenerate or unregenerate, and inasmuch as the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, the reason in the natural man will most readily assume an antagonistic attitude. But he that is spiritual will find the reason perceiving the more clearly the things of the Spirit of God. We cannot go back of these premises : debating back of these only deadlocks the issue.

The fact of the existence of these two classes of people, also, strictly speaking, postulates two kinds of scientific investigation, because radically different world-and-life-views underlie each of them. It is this circumstance which particularly affects Christian theology as it discusses a range of conceptions which from the nature of the case directly concerns the things which can be spiritually judged only. This fact absolutely denies those who stand outside of the Palingenesis the competency of judging in the premises. "Two principia [methods of acquiring knowledge] underlie the situation. 1. Man takes knowledge of almost everything by bringing the objects before him and proceeding to investigate them; 2. But of God he cannot thus obtain knowledge: what he thinks he knows through his own agency is mere guesswork. It is necessary that God reveal Himself to man, and man can only deal with what is revealed to him. Hence theology is obliged to proceed in a way all her own since she is dependent for her material upon what Scripture furnishes; whence Scripture as the source of his information imparted by a method in which man is entirely dependent, is called the *principium unicum theologiae*" (Kuyper, Encyc. II, Sec. 32).

Now Scripture as the revelation of the knowledge of God must be trustworthy. It must come from God Himself, and it can be trustworthy only when it is given by inspiration. We believe that Holy Scripture as a book before us is the inspired Word of God. It will be asked: How do you know this? We answer: Since Rationalism does not at all commend itself because of its poverty of guarantees, and because of its subjectivity, which from the nature of the case is not revelation, all hope of having anything reliable in that direction is cut off. A prospect of possessing something real and authoritative rests in the Reformed view that God has revealed Himself and that Holy Scripture is the sum-total of that revelation. This, then, is the Reformed *principle* of authority; that is, we hold this in an *axiomatic* way. We receive it and deal with it as with an axiom in mathematics. Any science does the same. "Every science, as we read in Aristotle, *assumes* its subject matter, and does not give an account of it" (Bosanquet). It must not, then, be expected that axiomata or first principles of any science be proved: that cannot be done. We must have some *working basis*. And similarly the Reformed principle of authority becomes the only workable principle: the only one which affords

any basis of action, and it is one which eminently accords with facts and experiences. Like the fitting together of the many pieces of a dissected map which cannot possibly be fitted together in any other way than in the only one right way, so the facts of existence and life can bring no harmony to the thought, nor satisfaction to the heart, except on that which comes to us through the use of the Reformed principle of authority. Let it be admitted that all this is based on an immense postulation, it is to be remembered as well that the principle of Rationalism is also based on a postulation which is far from satisfactory as it involves us in a maze of worse difficulties and is barren of results.

To repeat, the believer finds immense satisfaction and peace in receiving this revelation of God in its entirety and in straightforward language. And by virtue of the Palingenesis the believer comes to perceive that the Holy Spirit is involved in it all. The Spirit in his heart witnesses with his own spirit that this Scripture is the message of the Holy Spirit to him. There cannot but be the strongest affinity between the Spirit in the heart and that Word of His which comes to his heart. There obtains a mutual reaction which is the ground of peace and assurance. Of course, this cannot be objectively proved and many will scoff at this assertion and say it is all imagination and cant. Thornwell, however, puts it pointedly: "The reality of evidence is one thing, the power of perceiving it is quite another. It is no objection to the brilliance of the sun if it fails to illuminate the blind." In its final analysis these things cannot be proven except that the proof consists in the testimony of the Holy Spirit to our spirit that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God. They are therefore *autopistic* as the Reformers emphatically brought out. And it need not be strange to have recourse to such a principle for the purpose of gaining this particular kind of certainty in the unusual realm of spiritual things, because we, living as we do more immediately on the natural plane, "gain our certainty in regard to material things *by virtue of a testimony of God the Creator in the individual consciousness*" (Kuyper). It is often overlooked that in its deepest analysis the natural man in the functioning of his sense-perception is as dependent upon God as the spiritual man is for saving grace. "For in Him we live and move and have our being." Jesus testified to Nicodemus to the same effect (John iii. 10-12).

Says Bavinck : " Holy Scripture is autopistic, and therefore the last ground of faith. If you ask, Why do you believe Scripture ? the only answer is, Because it is the Word of God. But if you ask further : Why do you believe Scripture is the Word of God ? the Christian must remain indebted for the answer. We may indeed refer to the characteristics of Scripture, to the majesty of its style, etc., but these are not the grounds of faith : they are merely properties and characteristics which in course of time were discovered by believing thought. ' God has spoken ' is the prime principle to which all dogmas, that of Scripture included, can be led back. *The bond between the soul and Scripture lies behind consciousness and under the proofs.* It is mystic in nature in the same way as the deepest principles of the different sciences are." Again he says : " However, the accusation of subjectivism is justified only in that case when the subjective organ, which is indispensable for the observation of that which exists objectively, *is raised to the principle of knowledge.* The eye may be indispensable as the organ for the observation of light, but it is nevertheless *not* the *fountain* of light. This is precisely the mistake of idealistic rationalism, *that it identifies the organ with the source of knowledge.*" [My italics.]

Dr. J. H. Thornwell spoke after this manner : " The Protestant principle is that the truths of the Bible authenticate themselves as Divine by their own light. Faith is an intuition awakened by the Holy Ghost, and the truth is neither known nor believed until it is consciously realised by the illuminated mind as the truth of God. Intuition does not *generate*, but it *perceives* the truth. Reason under the guidance of the Holy Spirit appropriates and digests it. The knowledge is immediate and infallible. . . . The Word applies an external test which protects from imposture and deceit. The Spirit educates and unfolds a Divine life under the regulative guidance of the Word. The Bible and the Spirit are therefore equally essential to a Protestant theology " (Works, I, 49).

" The controversy over the reality of inspiration may therefore as well be given up because the consciousness in regard to it stands altogether on one line with all our primordial notions, as the consciousness of our Ego, of our being, of our continuity, of our thought processes, etc. Because these things are primordial *they are sufficient in themselves*, and, allowing of no demonstration, they cannot be silenced by contrary argument. And

in so far, then, the Fathers were entirely correct when they based their confession of the Scriptures on no other testimony than that of the Holy Spirit" (Kuyper, *Encyc. II*, 307).

"It is admitted that the approach of the believer to Scripture as he accepts its authority in advance is a *prejudiced one*. But for others it is just as true that he is prejudiced in favour of the authority of the reason, of the common opinion of the doctors, and for him it can never lie in Scripture as such. . . . In both cases the investigator is, before he begins his work, predisposed in the centre of his consciousness one way or the other. If one lives by virtue of the Palingenesis, then the mysticism of the heart will correspond with these Scriptures; but if one lives outside of the Palingenesis and hence out of a sinful nature, then the mysticism of the heart will stand antithetically over against the mysticism of Scripture. . . . Every attempt to convince the latter by means of argument must be given up as completely as when the Lord Jesus forebore to convince the Sanhedrin to the contrary when they had positively made up their minds that He was a blasphemer."

And now note how well Calvin has expressed himself, pioneer as he was in this unbeaten track: "But I answer that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is more excellent than that of reason. For as God is a capable witness in His Word in regard to Himself, likewise that Word will not find credence in the hearts of men before it is attested by the internal witness of the Spirit. Therefore it is necessary that the selfsame Spirit who has spoken by the mouths of the prophets shall enter into our hearts in order to convince us that they have faithfully spoken what had been divinely commanded them.

"This therefore ought to be established, that they who have been taught by the Holy Spirit in their heart rest completely in the Scriptures as being credible on their own account and may not subject its truth to argumentation and reasonings; inasmuch as they acquire that credibility, which they have with us, through the testimony of the Holy Spirit. For although Scripture through its majesty readily procures reverence, it does not seriously affect us till it is sealed in our hearts by the Spirit. When then we are illuminated through His power, we believe that the Scripture is from God, not through our own quality or that of others; but, going above human judgment, we postulate as surer than sure, that they flowed unto us through the ministry

of men from the very mouth of God, indeed in no other way than as if we beheld the godhead of God Himself" (Inst. I, 7, 4, 5).

And finally, the beautiful and eloquent setting forth of this matter in the Westminster Confession of Faith. "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church, to an high and reverent esteem of Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (I, 56).

In sum, then, since Rationalism in any form does not commend itself because of its lack of objective basis, since in its subjectivity it heavily discounts anything that comes from outside, all hope of having anything substantial and reliable to serve our deepest spiritual needs, is cut off. With the Divine origin and unique characteristics of Scripture taken away, man becomes a prey to doubt if not despair. The faith of Christendom has in these times been severely shaken so that thousands are crying out: Where can we find God? What can we know about Him? What is Christianity? However, a prospect is at least open of having something real and authoritative in the Reformed view that God has actually revealed Himself and that Holy Scripture is the record of that revelation. Axiomatic as this assurance may seem to be, nevertheless in all the problems of life and destiny the use of this axiom in our mathematics of the spiritual universe works out most admirably and effectively. The Reformed principle of Authority which determines the Divine origin and unique characteristics of Scripture is the only thing which will put solid ground under the tottering structure of historical Christianity.

## II. THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION

The Reformed also believe in the perspicuity of Scripture, meaning thereby that the "constant, pious reading of Scripture gives such a general knowledge of God and salvation in Christ



as is sufficient for it to be a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path." However, Scripture is also a book so profound and rich that it has ever taxed the greatest minds to gain but an approximate degree of its divine fulness.

When, then, the question presents itself, how we shall interpret that book, the Reformed have always maintained that if we are at all to arrive at anything definite and satisfactory, there must lie at the foundation of such interpretation the principle that Scripture, as it lies before us, must be understood in a plain, straightforward way, allowing for the use of figurative language according to the recognised rules of rhetoric, and going beyond this only when Scripture itself gives us the plain indications and the method.

Although the range of things in Scripture is largely supernatural and the mould Divine, these, projected into time and human relations, require unusual circumspection in order to understand them. It is well known that commentators and other thinkers upon Scripture have come more and more to the conviction that Scripture, given as it is by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless is clothed in human thought-forms, and is subject to conventional methods of interpretation; that the object of interpretation is to give the precise thought which the sacred writers intended to express; and that the sense of Scripture (generally speaking) is one. Even as far back as the days of the Reformation this was already seen by Calvin. Of him Schaff thus writes in praising him as a commentator:

"Calvin is the founder of the grammatico-historical exegesis. He affirmed and carried out the sound hermeneutical principle that the Biblical authors, like all sensible writers, wished to convey to their readers one definite thought in words which they could understand. A passage may have a figurative or a literal sense, but cannot have two senses at once. The Word of God is inexhaustible and applicable to all times, but there is a difference between explanation and application, and application must be consistent with explanation" (*Presb. and Ref. Rev.* III, 466).

Calvin himself speaks on this wise: "Scripture, they say, is fertile and thus produces a variety of meanings. I acknowledge that Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign. Let us

know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely" (Comm. on Gal., pp. 135, 136). And the Westminster Confession of Faith testifies to the same effect: "When there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it may be searched and known by other places that speak most clearly" (Chap. I, Sec. 9).

All kinds of rationalism take issue with this principle. The Modernism of today not only discounts the authority of Scripture as a whole, but also plays fast and loose with its interpretation; it sublimates many a passage which on its face gives support to various doctrines, so as to get rid of these doctrines. This is a very arbitrary process; not being subject to any organising principle it is beyond control and at the mercy of any number of subjectivities. Outspoken enemies of the doctrines of Scripture recognise this, and class Modernism with Atheism. Thus we read this illuminating statement in the Fifth Annual Report of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism: "This loss of faith causes consternation among the Orthodox, who are powerless to arrest the movement. The Reconcilers—the liberals and Modernists—are heroically saving the ship of Christianity by throwing her cargo overboard. With what zeal the Fosdicks, the Matthews and the whole crew of rescuers toss out, first the Garden of Eden and the Flood, followed by the Virgin Birth, Atonement and the Resurrection. And then they gain a great victory by getting rid of hell and heaven and of the devil and God, though with much ado they keep the name of the last. They may save the vessel of ecclesiasticism, but how long will men sail the seas in an empty ship? They will go ashore and enjoy life with the Atheists. We welcome the aid of the Modernists and pledge them our fullest co-operation in ridding the world of Fundamentalism—of any serious acceptance of Christian theology" (quoted in *Chr. Today*, December, 1931).

However, there is one matter on which the Orthodox have disagreed: namely, to what extent a literal interpretation may be pressed. In commenting on this, we are not taking sides but aim only to throw light upon this vexed question. Men, orthodox to the core; learned and honest, have entertained opinions which may not be lightly brushed aside. Greater harmony would be very desirable, but to that end further study of the question is

necessary. The question at issue extends to three increasingly difficult particulars :

(1) The use of figures of speech must be intelligently and honestly estimated. It will not do to twit one who believes in a literal interpretation with inconsistency when he reckons with the regular figures of speech. Any figure of speech must be estimated according to conventional methods. And to be sure, we do not directly get our doctrines from a rhetorical figure as such ; but any rhetorical figure can point to the character of the doctrine which is tropicalised by a figure of speech.

(2) There is also the question of symbolism. There actually obtains symbolism. Daniel and Revelation are replete with it. Baptism and the Lord's Supper have a considerable element of it. Now mistakes are being made from two opposite directions : namely, either interpreting all symbols as actual historical fact ; or else divesting them practically of all connection with what is designed to be illustrated under these symbols. In this, too, fine discrimination is required in order rightly and fully to understand Scripture.

(3) And finally, there is the question of so-called "spiritualisation," and its relation to the allegorical interpretation. In discussing this, it is necessary to be sure of our terms, for a real difference obtains here and we must, of course, avoid confusion of concepts. Any rhetoric recognises the Allegory : it is but an extended metaphor. The Parable of Scripture is of this order. And further, we must carefully estimate Scriptural designations of things rhetorical, and translation of these. Thus we read in Revelation xi. 8 : "the great city, which *spiritually* is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Any rhetorician will declare that this is a plain example of the metaphor. To be sure, the original word there used is *πνευματικῶς*. Is it certain that this word carries the meaning of what modern spiritualisers would make of it ? Was rhetoric then already developed in all its precision of definition ? And can it not here apply that much of Scripture is written, as Kuyper called it, in a *plastic* manner, especially when it comes to scientific matters and designations ? We ask these questions because the meaning of the word *πνευματικός* is perfectly satisfied by rendering it : "figuratively," or more precisely still, if you will : "metaphorically." The word *πνευματικός* used three times in 1 Corinthians x. 3, 4 and applied to meat, to drink and to a rock, is satisfied by interpreting it as "figurative" or "typical."

Origen brought in the so-called "allegorical" interpretation. But here again scientific precision requires that we understand that term in a different sense than ordinary rhetoric uses it today. Origen actually meant by it what today is called "spiritualisation." Kuyper held that in principle Origen was on the right track, but proceeded too far. He says in his *Encyclopædia* (III. 100, 101): "Likewise a theological hermeneutics which is aware of its high calling, may not rest till it has truly learned to interpret Scripture as *Scripture*. This has been felt from of old by those who have sought a mystical meaning behind the literary-grammatical sense, and who also had an open eye for the anagogical signification of the Word. Origen and those who came after him may have failed in the elaboration of this idea, and later allegorists have wellnigh lost all mental balance, nevertheless the fundamental idea from which they proceeded stands out high above the insipidity of those shallow interpreters who were unable to believe in a mystical sense back of the written Word, because rationalistic aridity had extinguished the mystical glow of the heart." But Kuyper, too, sensed danger, and in another connection warned against a "one-sided spiritualism" and that it "must not sink away into a bottomless idealism." Bavinck also said that spiritualisation must be resorted to "in a good sense."

Once more let me say that I am not choosing sides, and simply give facts and statements of others in order to draw attention to an important matter which has not yet reached its solution among the orthodox. The battle raging today between Fundamentalist and Modernist is directly concerned with this question. The Modernist is a first-class spiritualiser. Must we accept the Fall as actual fact? he asks. Did a real serpent talk to Eve in Paradise? And did the mere eating of the forbidden fruit bring the curse and death? These and a large number of other points hinge on the question of a literal or of a spiritual interpretation. The Post- and the Non-millennarian, who spiritualise numerous passages pertaining to Israel and certain questions in Eschatology, are insistent not to spiritualise such questions as, for instance, the three controverted animals, the Serpent, the Ass and the Whale. Reformed exegetes are pretty well agreed in holding that language ought to be interpreted in its most natural sense and according to the rules of a good rhetoric. It is even admitted that prophecy needs largely thus to be

interpreted. We need but refer to the First Advent of the Messiah, His Virgin Birth, His birth at Bethlehem, His riding in triumph into Jerusalem, His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, etc. And so it becomes a delicate matter clearly and correctly to bring out when prophecy must not be so interpreted but spiritualised.

Calvin's comment on Galatians iv. 22 gives food for thought in this connection. He says: "But what reply shall we make to Paul's assertion that these things are allegorical? Paul certainly does not mean that Moses wrote the history for the purpose of being turned into an allegory, but points out in what way the history may be made to answer the present subject. This is done by observing a figurative representation of the Church there delineated. And a mystical interpretation of this sort (*ἀναγωγή*) was not inconsistent with the true literal meaning, when a comparison was drawn between the Church and the family of Abraham. As the house of Abraham was then a true Church, so it is beyond all doubt that the principal and most memorable events which happened in it are so many types to us. As in circumcision, in sacrifices, in the whole Levitical priesthood, there was an allegory, as there is an allegory at the present day in our sacraments—so was there likewise in the house of Abraham; but this does not involve a departure from the literal meaning. Here speaks the man who said that "the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning; and let us embrace and abide by it resolutely." In Galatians iv. 22 he allows an "allegorical" or "anagogical" meaning, but observes that it is "not inconsistent with the true literal meaning," and that "this does not involve a departure from the literal meaning." Permit me to remark, however, that Calvin was after all such a great "spiritualiser" that even Kuyper takes issue with him.

It will be asked: When and to what extent may spiritualisation be resorted to? The usual answer is: That must be decided by the *analogia fidei*. Now by this *analogia fidei* is meant an objective measure or standard, which has previously been ascertained and whose application serves to indicate the construction of other points of doctrine. How does this apply to the matter under consideration? Have we that standard? This is rather doubtful. Our Confessions of Faith arrived at all their doctrines by the literal method of interpretation. And what is given on eschatological matters is rather meagre and

immature. A reference therefore to the analogia of faith where there is hardly one to speak of, becomes a begging of the question. For the Reformed principle of interpretation calls for a single meaning, for the obvious meaning, for the natural meaning; and the application of this principle has readily furnished all the great Calvinistic doctrines: these were not obtained by a spiritualisation of the passages. If, then, we must resort to spiritualisation in any particular doctrine we must first find our warrant in Scripture as we have no analogia fidei to fall back upon. That which constitutes an analogia fidei must first be established.

### III. THE PRINCIPLE OF DOGMATIC CONSTRUCTION

The authority for our religious knowledge lying secure, its correct interpretation having been arrived at, it remains to treat of the setting forth in complete order and in its relations the things revealed to us.

The general character of Scripture is such that we do not possess a scientifically developed and legally exact formulation of definitions of doctrines and duties with precise references to all sorts of circumstances. Some have, in effect, acted according to this view. According to them "Scripture would consist of four parts: 1, a notarially exact statement of a certain number of facts; 2, an exposition of particular doctrines in well-defined formulation; 3, a law constructed like the articles of the legal code; and 4, an official programme of events which are still to come to pass." Although this may be denied theoretically, it is fact that in practice Scripture has largely been used in this way, as when a slavish citation of a text is made without regard to context and relations. Although the Reformers were not altogether free from this tendency, nevertheless they strove after a comprehensive view. But "as a matter of fact, in the eighteenth and in the beginning of the nineteenth centuries this unscientific method was more generally followed, particularly under Methodistic and Pietistic influences." It is true that Scripture does actually contain texts which by themselves leave little or nothing to be desired for the absoluteness of their meaning; but this is the case to only a limited extent. "The task which has been imposed upon us is much more difficult and complicated, and, far from being a mechanical citation of texts with the aid of a concordance, it requires herculean labour to

derive from Scripture all that it contains. Special revelation does not tolerate indolence, nor does it aim to put the knowledge of God before you as bread well baked and cut ready for use, but it calls for man's utmost efforts. The best minds have laboured to this end century after century, each generation making use of the work of the previous one, and with the accumulated results and experiences we have today more fully entered into a clearer apprehension of the knowledge of God. God designs that we exercise our powers, and as with growing wonderment we attempt to sound the depths and scale the heights of the Divine wisdom, we are led to adoration and praise to the only wise God."

Here, then, is the principle of dogmatic construction. Doctrines not lying ready to hand needed to be ascertained by comparing Scripture with Scripture through a faithful use of our intellectual faculties, the noblest God has given us. "Since the days of Arius it has been a moot question returning ever and anon, whether Theology had the right to gain from Scripture by logical deduction what is not expressed in so many words. Almost every view which found it an advantage to clamp on to the *letter* of the Word and to ward off the *consequentiae Scripturae*, has objected to such logical deduction. In theory this view was defended only by a few Anabaptists and later also by the Methodists without their being consistent in its application." However, reason is also of God, and logic is divine. Christ is *the λόγος*, and our service is *λογική* (Romans xii. 1). It would seem, therefore, that there could be no higher and worthier use of man's noblest faculty than to attempt to think the thoughts of God after Him. This is a discipline of highest value. Theology is the Queen of Sciences.

Nature, which too is of God, furnishes many analogies. As it lies before us, it seems to present a mass of unrelated facts and powers. But the scientist finds its system. In an eloquent passage Dr. Thomas Guthrie points out the close relation between God's thoughts in nature and in grace. He says: "Having scattered over an open field the bones of the human body, bring an anatomist to the scene. Conduct him to the valley where Ezekiel stood with his eye on the skulls and dismembered skeletons of an unburied host. Observe the man of science how he fits bone to bone and part to part till from those scattered members he constructs a framework which, apart from our horror at the eyeless sockets and fleshless form, appears perfectly

divinely beautiful. In hands which have the patience to collect and the skill to arrange these materials, how perfectly they fit! Bone to bone and joint to joint till the whole figure rises to the polished dome and the dumb skeleton seems to say, 'I am fearfully and wonderfully made!' Now as with parts of the human frame, so is it with the doctrines of the Gospel. Scattered over the pages of sacred history, let them also be collected and arranged in systematic order, and how beautifully they fit! Doctrine to doctrine and duty to duty; till all connected with each other, all 'members one of another,' they rise up into a form of perfect symmetry and present that very system which with minor differences but with substantial unity is embodied in the Confessions, Creeds and Catechisms of Evangelical Christendom. . . . The doctrines and duties of the Gospel are scattered here and there over the face of Scripture much as the plants of Nature are upon the surface of the globe. There, for example, we meet with nothing corresponding to the formal order, systematic classification, and rectangular beds of a botanical garden; on the contrary, the creations of the vegetable kingdom lie mingled in what, although beautiful, seems to be wild confusion . . . but amid this apparent disorder the eye of science discovers a perfect system in the floral kingdom; and just as—though God has certainly scattered these forms over the face of Nature without apparent arrangement—there is a botanical system, so there is as certainly a theological system although its doctrines and duties are not classified in the Bible according to dogmatic rules. Does it not appear from this circumstance that God intended His Word to be a subject of study as well as faith; and that man should find in its saving pages a field for the exercise of his highest faculties? We are commanded to compare 'spiritual things with spiritual'; we are to 'search the Scriptures,' to dig for their treasures, to dive for the pearls" (Gospel in Ezekiel, pp. 1, 2).

The correct principle, then, is that we are to be guided by the comprehensive view in which all the details can get their due relation and right perspective. Many a text all by itself cannot give this and any attempt to be guided by a single passage may lead us into error on account of the lack of some necessary element which is not mentioned. Thus an insistence upon the absolute expression of the words of Mark xvi. 16 must compel adult baptism as the only valid one, and also teach the damnation



of those who do not believe, which would include infants. Other examples could be given.

We believe that the Holy Spirit so led the prophets and apostles that they gave us an infallible Scripture. Our principle of authority brings this out. But beyond this, it is an interesting question as to what extent the Holy Spirit leads and guides the interpreter and the dogmatician : in how far can we expect their work to be reliable ? We have the promise of the Holy Spirit to be with us, to enlighten us, to show us the truth, etc. We may believe that He is interested and greatly concerned about the use to which His Word has been and is being put in the course of Church history. The Reformed loved to call Him the " doctor ecclesiae." Indeed, that is fine and its implication is heartening. But in the presence of human frailty, self-seeking, bigotry, etc., what can we do with this ? Kuyper says this about it : " To be sure, the *ὁδηγησις* of the Holy Spirit aims to be directly efficacious in its final outcome, and He least of all designs that this be the case in every stage of His action. . . . A guide is given you of whom you know for sure that in the end He will bring you where you have to be. But that guide does not therefore lead you *recta linea* at once to the desired end. You approach that end only by degrees ; and in order that your own reflection and your personal activity may be developed, that guide allows you to make all kinds of detours, He lets you pursue all paths that lead to an impasse, so that you may of your own conviction give that up ; and under all these seemingly conflicting actions He keeps the end in view and brings it about that you finally turn into the right way " (Encyc. II, 540). Of course, we dare not speak of infallibility of what man has attained even under this leading of the Holy Spirit, but we believe that *pro mensura humana* the content of the truth is being attained in larger and larger measure : we approximate thereunto more and more. " As being in the service of the Holy Spirit theology is called ever to test the historic confessional life of the Church at its origin and to appraise it after the norma of Holy Scripture " (*Ibid.*, 541). The divine and the human are in constant interaction with constant gain for the truth. There obtains amongst theologians constant re-examination of what has already been found ; and the farther we get along, to that extent our satisfaction with what we have will increase. Indeed, the Holy Spirit works in an imperfect Church, but He uses it, such as it may be, and when

necessary, He raises up men who make the great advances for the truth. It may stumble us to read of the circumstances in which the earlier Ecumenical Councils met and worked. However, in spite of grave imperfection and sin, it has pleased the Holy Spirit to have them perform marvellous work, so final, seemingly, that the repeated reconsideration of their findings by later theologians steadily gains their approval. This test cannot be met by later Councils: the degree of apostasy was evidently progressing so far that the Holy Spirit was not present to keep them from error. Fatal forsaking overtakes those who lord it over God's heritage, who quench the Spirit in His sovereign grace, and who deny special revelation.

It is a common objection that theology is lifeless, mediæval and really unnecessary for true religion. However, Kuyper insists that true theology can be cultivated only within the sphere of the Palingenesis—by those who are truly believers, in whose heart the Holy Spirit resides, who honour that Word which He Himself inspired. And so the matter simply resolves itself into this, that “religious knowledge and experience obtain in three ways: *personally*, as any believer, even the most unlearned, has a personal share in the salvation wrought by Jesus Christ, appropriated through faith and affording peace and comfort; *ecclesiastically*, as this places the confession of the Church relative to this salvation before the world; and *scientifically*, as thus the knowledge of God is brought more completely and fully into the consciousness of humanity.” Kuyper further succinctly expresses it in these words: “Theology serves to enrich our consciousness, to enhance the enjoyment of our salvation, and to make a purer communion with the Eternal One possible” (Encyc. III, 349). To be sure, we must avoid intellectualism which uses the Word for purely scholastic ends; but we must also avoid an unbridled mysticism which builds religion out of subjective feelings with scant regard for revelation. The true way lies in the combined use of all our faculties, regulated by the Word of God, in order that “being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians iii. 18, 19). And so the study of the Word is not only for edification; nor merely for being an instrument for the saving of the lost, but its basic purpose is to grasp the

Divine truth, that is to say, to reflect the glory of God in what He is and does, in what He will be and do. We honour Him as we contemplate His attributes as these reflect themselves in His revelation and in the history of the Church. This contemplation must needs subserve adoration and devotion. A well constructed Dogmatic Theology brings out in full view the marvellous wisdom and grace of God and best prepares for its proper presentation. We must not detract from a fervid way of presenting the gospel of divine grace for lost sinners, but neither may we detract from seeking the fullest comprehension of the character and the ways of the Adorable One, who is not only the Way and the Life, but also the Truth. Theological study, pursued under the energising power of the Holy Spirit, cannot but be a most valuable pursuit as it honours God, fits us for all our tasks and energises us for their proper execution.

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