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THE THEOLOGY OF SCHLEIERMACHER: SOME CHARACTERISTIC ELEMENTS

IN THESE days a shadow has fallen over the teaching and influence of Schleiermacher. It may be well, however, to recall something of the measure of the greatness of this creative figure and to realise that there is a many-sided treatment in his discussion of theological problems which deserves renewed attention.

No one denies the vast impetus Schleiermacher gave to the religious and theological forces of the nineteenth century by the publication of *The Discourses on Religion* in 1799 and *The Christian Faith* in 1821, yet less unanimity prevails in the estimate of his detailed theories and arguments. Because these are so varied, numerous and rich, the pattern becomes confused, distinctive features are blurred and the design passes from one colour and scheme into another with bewildering effect. The title of this article would suggest that it is possible from the intricate web of his thought to pick out certain strands which are mainly responsible for the colour and arrangement of the whole design. When this is done, a new sympathy may be gained with this master-mind and perhaps a more just appreciation of his contribution to the subsequent development of his subject.

Inevitably the character and circumstances of the man merit attention. Much is to be explained in his case from the education he received, the influence of his associates, the activity and genius of the spirit with which he was endowed. These items, if they do not justify, at least throw light upon the combinations and even the contradictions within his system and mind.

Living at a time before specialisation had set its inevitable limitations upon men's faculties and when it was still possible for daring and enthusiastic scholars to press forward to achieve the ideal of Bacon and take all knowledge to be their province, Schleiermacher was, if not one of the most learned, yet one of those most sensitive to all the varied influences which made the beginning of the nineteenth century so rich an epoch of culture.

Of a deeply religious nature, he came in youth under the spell of the Moravian Brotherhood. The philosophy of Kant early attracted his critical mind, and while at home in the systems

of his own day he was specially interested in Plato, planning and in part executing a translation of his works. Intercourse with the leaders of the Romantic Movement, the Schlegels especially, with their emphasis upon Art and the rights of the individual, awakened and stimulated the aesthetic sense which is latent in many speculative and religious natures and further added to his equipment. With these associates too he shared the newly awakened feeling for the historical and the natural over against the intellectual, abstract and universalising tendencies of the survivors of the eighteenth century. A reaction had set in against the Rationalism of that period, whose power had not been confined to the critics of Orthodoxy but had found expression among its defenders. Both parties, opposed as they were, moved within the same circle of unsatisfactory pre-suppositions, and from the dangers of each the citadel of faith, in Schleiermacher's estimation, must be defended.

While these influences must be noted, it would be wrong to suppose that the personality or the theology of our author was the passive product of such forces. Nothing could be more independent than his attitude to the questions of the day. What he accepted from his associates he had first made his own and he set much aside that at one stage or another failed to commend itself to his critical mind. Romanticism, despite its glamour and its many friends, could not hold him prisoner. Kant's critical philosophy was not thorough enough for him. And while a loyal servant of the Church as preacher and professor, and interested in the union of the two warring Churches of the Reformation, Lutheran and Reformed, he criticised frankly their doctrines and creeds and advocated their separation from the State as a necessary step to the realisation of their true freedom.

A representative man of his time therefore, he was nevertheless one who looked forward even more than backward, "the most outstanding figure of the nineteenth century", he has been called, because determinative of the whole future development of that epoch. But if we look for a centre of unity in his theology, that will be found rather in the personality of the author than in the actual system he elaborated. Varied lines of thought cross and recross within that system and are never completely harmonised.

It is possible therefore to speak of "characteristic elements"

in the theology of Schleiermacher. Four of these will be considered: (1) the systematic; (2) the experiential, subjective or psychological; (3) the philosophical; (4) the historical—all with special reference to his *Glaubenslehre* ("The Christian Faith, a systematic exposition according to the principles of the Evangelical Church").

I

Though eager to set aside the current emphasis on Reason, Schleiermacher was thoroughly imbued with the scientific spirit which longs for precision of language, *systematic* arrangement, and harmonious unity. Certainly he admits that the Christian Faith in and for itself requires no apparatus of intellectual refinement for its operation in the soul of the individual or the circumstances of social family life. But in the interests of the Church, in the effort to extend her borders by the preaching of the Redeemer as well as to satisfy the natural desire to understand the relation of faith to the other activities of the human constitution, the highest possible degree of definiteness is desirable in dogmatic propositions. Nothing less than a *Lehrgebäude* or "edifice of doctrine", complete and well-proportioned, is to be aimed at.

Previous efforts of the Reformed Church merit frank criticism, we are told. Too much has been taken over by these statements from the old theology: they have not been true throughout to the Reformation principle of faith and experience: further, they are really without co-ordination, unsystematic, "nothing but an aggregate of individual propositions whose inner connection is not brought to light" (*Gl.* par. 128, 3).

What he himself aims at is to free Dogmatics from the speculation and the supernaturalism which leave theology dependent on the authority of the philosopher or the historian, and at the same time to bring theology definitely into relation to Christian piety. This aim and procedure will involve the abolition of the old *loci theologici* method of demonstration and the discovery of a principle or rule to exhibit the inner unity of the various elements brought together (*Gl.* par. 15). Christian doctrine is the systematic arrangement of Christian propositions of faith which are conceptions of (or modifications of) Christian pious states of mind represented in speech. To quote (*Gl.* par. 19, 4) *Zusatz*:

THE THEOLOGY OF SCHLEIERMACHER 111

“There is only one source from which all Christian doctrine is derived, namely, the self-announcement of Christ, and only one way in which doctrine, complete or incomplete, arises, out of the pious consciousness itself and the immediate expression of the same.”

At the same time it is asserted that what distinguishes the Christian religion from all others is, that everything in it is referred to the salvation accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth. In consequence the idea of “Redemption” secures a foremost place as determinative of the theological system; but unfortunately “Piety” has been defined as the “feeling of absolute dependence”, and the speculative interest of the writer joined to the apologetic needs of the hour leads him to arrange his theological material with only lip-service to the great truth upon which he has lighted. A glance at this arrangement will carry us further to the understanding of his scheme.

“We shall exhaust the extent of Christian Dogmatic, if we consider the facts of the religious self-consciousness, (1) as the opposition expressed in the idea of salvation already presupposes them, and (2) as they are defined *per se*” (Gl. par. 29).

Consequently the *Glaubenslehre* is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the religious consciousness apart from the concrete representation given in the Christian consciousness with its opposition of Sin and Grace: the second concerned with the more specific Christian consciousness and this under the two sub-divisions of “Sin” and “Grace”.

The value of such an Outline lies in the demonstration it gives of the author's desire for completeness and, more particularly with reference to his philosophic views, the assistance it gives us in deciding how far these latter views influence and determine the specifically Christian statement of the Second Part, or on the other hand how far the experiential element is able to hold its own against the speculative allies brought in to support it.

To put the matter in another way, Schleiermacher assures us that he is dealing in the First Part of his Doctrine with what is pre-supposed in Christianity but is yet apart from it. This friendly service however is carried through in so abstract a fashion that he falls back into the “Natural Religion” which he formerly scouted in the *Discourses* as “a mess of moral and metaphysical crumbs”, “a somewhat only striving to existence”. As a result his conception of “religion” as “the feeling of

absolute dependence" is never really brought into line with what in other sections he has to say of the special redemptive and historical nature of Christianity.

The motive in this procedure we may recognise to be that so clearly expressed in the *Discourses* of presenting an *Apologia* to the cultured despisers of religion by showing religion to be a universal and essential element in the human consciousness apart from the Church and Revelation, but this is not the only case where the Apologist has played the Theologian false.

The desire for completeness and system to which we have referred led Schleiermacher to discuss each part of his main division, the one on Religion as presupposed in Christianity without reference to the opposition of sin and grace, the other the specifically Christian, under three sections or points of view: (1) as descriptions of human states of life; (2) as concepts of divine attributes or modes of action; (3) as expressions of the constitution of the world. Such a threefold discussion of man, God, and the world, instead of assisting towards unity, clearness and harmony, detracts from these desirable aims. Once divided the parts are never really brought together again and the result is confusion, repetition and omission. There is no treatment of the doctrine of Revelation, although what is said about Holy Scripture and the Church is rich in many suggestions. Above all, the doctrine of God is hard to find, and even with the threefold discussion of the divine attributes we are left in doubt as to their relation to the original source of existence—whether they are objectively real or simply the result of our apprehending.

Yet, as often with Schleiermacher, the intention is better than the execution, and the idea of Theology as capable of systematic arrangement in language scientifically clear and consistent, with its unity and guiding principle in Jesus Christ and the salvation He accomplishes has contributed signally to the rehabilitation of Theology. In seeking to determine also the position of Theology with reference to its related sciences of Apologetics and Christian Ethics he has been called the greatest systematic theologian since Thomas Aquinas. As it is, however, the actual Scheme of the *Glaubenslehre* throws light rather upon the various influences operating upon his thought. Further discussion will elucidate and confirm this judgment.

II

We pass now from the Form to the Material, or in other words consider the *experiential, psychological or subjective* element in his teaching. For the moment these terms are used as roughly equivalent. How they differ will be seen as the exposition proceeds.

Unquestionably one of the great tasks to which Schleiermacher felt urgently summoned and for undertaking which he has earned the gratitude of all was to bring men back to a real vital sense of religion. Here the Preacher in the man found a congenial message, delivered with all the power of his imagination, intellect and eloquence. "As a man I speak to you of the sacred secrets of mankind," he cries. This personal note in the *Discourses*, published first in 1799, awakened the interest of the public at once. Out of the necessity and impulse of his nature the writer offered his glowing thoughts. Religion was no dead thing of States or Institutions, theology or ritual, neither the guardian of morality nor a collection of Ideas. Religion was something *sui generis*, springing from its own root in human nature, not a secondary product dependent on other faculties. It was immediate experience, feeling with all its own interest, intensity, warmth and power, a sense for the Infinite and Eternal. By making such claims for Religion he cut himself adrift at once from the Moralism of Kant and the Rationalism of orthodox theologians. He has been named a second Luther, bringing back the true Reformation doctrine of *certitudo salutis*, the assurance of faith in the heart of the believer, and the reality of personal religion.

The salvation wrought by Christ is at once necessary for man and sufficient. Sin has its own substance and terror, not to be explained away, as in Rationalism, as that which is gradually decreasing while good is as gradually and as surely increasing. His Moravian training stood him in good stead in the formation of such utterances. As to the importance of the Person and the Work of Christ, the sentences in which his belief is set forth have become decisive and illuminating for the theology of the nineteenth century. How fresh and clear is the note in these sentences:

"Christianity is the mode of faith belonging to a teleological tendency of Religion and it is distinguished from others of a similar nature in that everything

in it is referred to the salvation accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth" (*Gl.* par. 11). "There is no other way of participating in the Christian Community than through faith in Jesus as the Saviour."

And again:

"We have fellowship with God only in that living fellowship with the Saviour wherein his absolutely sinless perfection and blessedness represent the activity freely going out from him, and the necessity of salvation of the pardoned the receptiveness freely laying hold on him" (*Gl.* par. 91).

The Person of Christ is to be understood in the light of his work:

"The characteristic activity and the exclusive worth of the Saviour refer back to one another and are in the self-consciousness of the believer inseparably one and the same" (*Gl.* par. 92).

In such words as these, in his affirmations that faith is a necessary qualification for a theologian, that theology starts from the certainty of redemption through Christ, a new epoch has opened, the touch of a master is felt who would awaken theology to new ways of life.

Unfortunately there is another side to his argument which has been emphasised of late by many critics. The spectre of subjectivity ever haunts the philosophy of experience, and visits this theology. Amid so much that rings true, welcome and inspiring to the ear of the Christian believer, there sounds ever the dissonance of a doubt that after all our experience is valid only within the range of our human limitations and may not be ultimately real. Religion is piety, feeling. It can be defined almost without referring to God at all, and despite many suggestive hints by the way it is left unrelated to the other activities of thought and will. It is true he is compelled to define further the nature of "feeling" or "the sense for the infinite", as he sometimes calls it, and in opposition to the sentimental and non-moral aestheticism of the Romantic School declared "the immediate consciousness of Absolute Dependence to be the only way in which the finite and the infinite being can be one". If it be said that such a statement is vague until one determines the nature of that infinite Power upon which the finite is dependent, the only reply is that the writer's philosophical preconceptions are responsible for this unsatisfactory position. His craving to get at the essence of religion *per se* led him to set it outside all relations except the very slightest and to be content to say this feeling of absolute dependence is no more than immediate consciousness of a relationship.

When such a meagre concept of religion is carried from the First Part of the *Glaubenslehre* to the Second, at once the danger arises that the objective facts of revelation and history will be misconstrued or neglected. Revelation never adequately discussed falls together with piety. "Christian propositions of faith are conceptions of Christian pious states of mind represented in speech." Dogmatics is thus ensnared in the net of subjective relationships. Faith is not here, as it is with the Reformers, the medium or vehicle of the religious apprehension of God, for faith becomes, as it were, its own object and as such is the material of Theology.

It would seem that the writer has fallen into the error of confusing belief as a psychological event in consciousness with belief as an objective content or meaning. Our perceptions of the external world, for example, are first of all significant of the things they refer to, whilst it requires a process of abstraction and reflection to consider them apart from this external world and to view them as events of one's own mind. While in the first case they are vehicles of perception, in the second only are they themselves the objects of consciousness. But Christian Theology is not concerned with this secondary significance of faith as a psychological event but has its interest in the content or objective reference which is immediately "given". That is to say, Christian experience claims to be apprehension of God in Christ, obtaining unity and content only as it is in contact with objective fact. Instead of emphasising therefore the fact of pious states of consciousness as the material of Theology, stress must be laid on the revelation of God the Father as represented to us by Jesus Christ.

III

For this subjectivity and phenomenalism the *philosophical* background of Schleiermacher's thought is as much responsible as his psychological method, and to this speculative position we now turn for further enlightenment. For the moment let it be enough to say that the appearance of this subjectivity seriously cripples the great teacher's grasp of the extent of Christian truth, and because of it Ritschl, though not free himself of the same flaw, and others after him, affirm that it is doubtful if the influence of Schleiermacher has really been wholesome. Moving

out to the Left Wing this influence culminated in the undogmatic theology and the *Leben Jesu* of Strauss, where Jesus figures only as a religious genius, not the incarnate Son of God.

Some reference has already been made to the philosophical element in the thought of our author when we discussed his idea of System and the dominance in the Schema of the *Glaubenslehre* of the specifically Christian Section by the preceding general discussion. What then was his philosophy?

Briefly stated, his philosophy was a Monism based on the "critical" theory of Kant. While holding firmly to the ultimate unity behind all knowing and being, Schleiermacher rejected all knowledge of this transcendental world. Knowledge strictly speaking belongs only to the world of "phenomena", the world of interaction, change and multiplicity; and since the Will also operates in this sphere of contrast he does not accept the argument of Kant that we find in this activity a power to lead us to the transcendental. Yet Schleiermacher does not follow the Phenomenalistic or Agnostic path wholly, as so many have done who accepted the Critical philosophy. There exists an ultimate Unity of Subject and Object, of Ideal and Real, of Thought and Being: of this he insists we are certain. Feeling takes us up through the world of opposition and brings us into immediate touch with the infinite and eternal. The world itself has a certain unity so far, but it is a unity which includes contrasts. Art too with its fantasy enables us to grasp Man, Nature and the World in one single apprehension. But our thought and analysis must be pushed up to the very Source of things, to reveal a unity beyond that of the universe, a unity excluding all differences.

So exalted is this original Being that it would appear as if the immanence of God were denied in the world, and the two fell apart: or if still related, that God was simply the other side of the world, while the "Feeling" which brings us into touch with the transcendental seems as useless and devoid of meaning as the mystic's rapture.

Yet this "Feeling" over and over again is stated to be the essence of Religion, and to ask for more definite information about it, as indeed is essential for our grasp of the system, is to find ourselves confronted by the difficulties of Schleiermacher's psychology and philosophy.

At first, as we have learned, it is described as mere Feeling, a third element in consciousness along with Will and Thought. More details have to be furnished as the argument proceeds and it is defined as "the Feeling of absolute Dependence". Finally supported by the following analysis the latter appears as equivalent to "the highest form of self-consciousness" (*Gl.* pars. 4 and 5). The analysis runs thus: there are three grades of consciousness to be considered, the merely sentient or animal which does not distinguish subject or object, then the ordinary rational consciousness where the distinction referred to makes its appearance, and lastly this "highest form of self-consciousness" where the subject-object relationship is overcome and the Ego has direct and immediate contact with the ultimate Unity. Timeless, identical, universal, perfectly simple, and above contrasts, this highest form of self-consciousness, the "Feeling of absolute Dependence", is no longer the psychological "Feeling" co-ordinate with "Knowing" and "Willing" but the form of Rationality in man, the ground of all his activities, corresponding to the objective, rational Principle, God.

These changes had as their source and motive both the speculative impulse and the apologetic interest. Atheism is proved to be impossible, for the conditions of the possibility of Religion are given in the constitution of human nature itself. Though in certain cases there may not be a full realisation of the infinite element in every one, religion exists *a priori*, an essential and original element in man.

From such transcendental heights Schleiermacher makes great efforts to get back to the concrete world. If this highest self-consciousness had no connection with the second stage below it, then it must always be concealed or appear only after the other had been driven out, that is to say, we should have no self-consciousness in thinking or acting and no known unity. But in the actual appearing of this highest self-consciousness such a separation never takes place. This timeless, perfectly simple "Feeling of absolute Dependence" is always associated with the second stage of consciousness, the realm of contrast and variety, sharing in the opposition of pleasure and pain, operating at the same time as a demand to organise our life according to the Pattern in the Mount, and to seek amid all discords and differences constancy, evenness and unity.

A practical aim in the discussion is thus suggested. Religion, at least in the definition given of Christianity, is teleological. To man is assigned a partial independence, thus distinguishing him from Nature. It is as if the argument would lift us up to the sublime thought that man's life is not only a coming from God and a dependence on God, but a returning to Him. Unfortunately that line of thought is never followed out. The Ground of our being and of the being of the world lies beyond both: God is the "Source", the "Whence" (*Woher*) of the "Feeling of absolute Dependence" which results, but God is the "Source" only, not the "Goal" (*Wohin*), for He is vaguely defined as "absolute Causality", and the distinction between Man and Nature in the relation of each to God consequently comes to nothing.

Schleiermacher forgets that his abstract definitions require to be modified when introduced into concrete conditions of life and that ideals expressing purpose are not the same as universal concepts. Had more justice been done to the specific nature of Man and his relative freedom over against the world, a distinction often touched upon and absolutely necessary for his Christology but never developed, he would have been led out of his transcendentalism and phenomenalism to a more organic view of the nature and immanence of God and the objectivity of human knowledge.

Some of the consequences of this theory in his theological discussion may be indicated briefly. The Feeling of absolute Dependence, or in another form the principle of rationality, appears later as the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus, the divine nature in Him, which makes Him not only the *Vorbild* or Pattern of men, but the *Urbild* or Archetype. A rationalistic glamour in this way is cast over the relation of the two Natures and the cosmological functions of Christ. In His sinless development no struggle or temptation is involved, for gradually the human nature or the "sensible" part is penetrated by the "rational" or divine. And the World-task to which He is called is simply the organisation of the world into a perfect harmony where the "manifold" is unified and the "sensible" material is taken up into the "rational". That is to say, ethical and personal categories drop out to give place to a strife or process of abstract principles.

Most clearly is the danger of his philosophical attitude and inclinations brought to our notice in his dealing with the question

of Sin. A religion of redemption, such as he stoutly affirms Christianity to be, must deal resolutely with this factor, but a monistic system must ever be reluctant to admit such an inconvenient element. Standing on the basis of Christian experience our author asserts that Sin is a thing which *ought not* to be, it is an interruption of nature in the consciousness we have of our original perfection: yet in relation to the concept of God as "absolute Causality" there would appear to be a twofold departure from the previous confident assertion. On the one hand we are not sure if the attributes of God, "holiness" and "righteousness", which condemn sin in Conscience and make us view evil as punishment, express the real nature of Ultimate Reality or not, for, we read (*Gl.* par. 50): "all attributes which we impute to God ought not to designate anything special in God, but only something special in the way of referring the Feeling of absolute Dependence to Him."

Thus from the subjective standpoint sin may be real for us, yet it is only *consciousness* of sin and from the ultimate standpoint does not exist. What the Reformers laid such stress upon, the objective aspect of sin, is shattered, and Christianity with its ideal of redemption vanishes into a shadow-play. Reconciliation is no longer a reconciliation with God but the coming to regard evil in the world as not evil but stimulus.

Further, sin is not merely devalued or undermined in this thoroughgoing fashion, but it is viewed as the result of incomplete development, the preponderance of "sense" over "spirit", "will" over "intellect", because at first the God-consciousness or "Feeling of absolute Dependence" is weak. As a necessary element apparently in man's growth sin is not really sin: gradually it will decline while good will increase. Such a doctrine is familiar among the Pelagians and the Rationalists, but surely a strange guest in the household of one who criticises these schools so severely! Schleiermacher has paid dearly for his speculative indiscretions. The idea of God as "Absolute Causality" suited his critical reluctance to say more of God than that He was the Source of the "Feeling of absolute Dependence" but this vague conception overshadowed like a pall the deeper and experiential elements of his thought.

IV

The last element which we have to consider in this somewhat tangled scheme of fine cobweb and warm feeling is the *Historical*. With its appearance we may expect the subjective tendencies of Schleiermacher's theories to find a corrective and the personal emphasis to be broadened and enriched by reference to previous or contemporary expressions of faith, while at the same time a check is put upon the tyrannical and insidious demands of speculation or system. A new discovery in his day, the sense for the historical incited his criticism of current Rationalistic views. In the *Discourses* he scoffed at their "Natural Religion" or "Universal Religion" "consisting of a few metaphysical and moral crumbs". Such a presentation was all too vague and valueless, "a mere vapour", "a thin and dispersed mass said to float between two worlds", "a waiting for existence". Popular religion had no point of contact with the reality of religious experience. Definite religion must begin with a concrete original fact. To object to the individual in favour of the universal was to object to life itself and to what was real. Religion exists in men who are historical beings: there is no such thing as "a man in general".

In this section of his discussion the views of our author reveal signs of change not always acknowledged. Laying stress as he does on the importance of individuals as the founders of a religious community, he is sometimes drawn to forget them in the interest of the latter. This or that teacher, for example, lays hold upon some central intuition or some new relation of man to the universe, to have his discovery hailed with delight by many disciples. Yet at times we are led to think that the "intuition" or "idea" of this religious relation is far more important than the "person" through whom it comes.

The matter is not quite simple, however, for the "idea" continues to be "historical" when it is taken up into a community, and if that occurs he considers that his own test is satisfied. Consistently with this conviction he asserts that both "pantheism" and "Natural Religion" are to be rejected, for neither has ever appeared as the confession of a historical religious community. They have no standing for his theology.

As for religions designated "positive" or "historical", he tells us that one positive religion is distinguished from others

by its outward historical origin, as well as by its inward divergence of principle from other developed modes of faith of the same kind and at the same stage (*Gl.* par. 10). As a result of such reasoning the definition of Christianity emerges, as we have seen, in the form of "a monotheistic mode of faith belonging to the teleological tendency of piety and distinguishing itself from all other such in this essentially, that everything in it is referred to the salvation accomplished through Jesus of Nazareth" (*Gl.* par. 11).

Judaism and Mohammedanism represent other monotheistic faiths, and the former as well as Christianity is teleological with a practical reference to a moral task. Christianity, however, stands unique in two respects, for with it salvation is the centre of piety and further is accomplished only through Jesus of Nazareth. A place is therefore assigned to Jesus totally different from that occupied by any other founder of religion. While these others were chiefly concerned with establishing a community on a basis of doctrine or ritual, the characteristic work of Jesus was the saving of men to bring them into fellowship with Himself. It would be hard for a Mohammedan or a Jew, he argues, to deny that the revelation or the Law could have been given by another than the actual prophet. "But Jesus as Saviour unique and universal is placed over against all others and is never in any way considered as requiring salvation: consequently also, as universal opinion declares, He is originally distinguished from all other men and from His birth onwards is equipped with saving power" (*Gl.* par. 11, 4).

In this emphasis upon the uniqueness of Christ as an historical figure we should have expected sure and stable ground on which to build a satisfactory doctrine. But contrary to this expectation the experiential element, instead of supplementing and supporting the historical view, tends to narrow and weaken it. Schleiermacher is ever calling up the evidence of the first disciples and seems to wish to limit his theological material by the limitations of their capacities, while on the other hand the Resurrection, Ascension, and Session of our Lord, though accepted on the testimony of the first disciples, are ruled out of consideration because not redemptively important. In consequence of these restrictions justice is never done to the historicity of Christ in the wider sense, as One who is still the living and active Lord of

the community He founded. What may be called the supra-historical element in the Person of Christ tends to vanish. Christ is indeed the archetype who has become historical, but, although His sinlessness is affirmed and also the fact that with Him a new beginning is made, His uniqueness is qualified otherwise and becomes less distinctive and pronounced. All life, we are told, is mysterious in its origin, and each life a new beginning. Christ is only the turning-point in the arrival of a new epoch, a merely historical individual after all. And again, though the "second Adam", the Source of the God-consciousness and the perfecter of creation, He is transformed by the magic wand of metaphysics into the Principle which He introduces, the striving of the "rational" to a complete organisation of the "sensible".

That is to say, the "supra-historical" element which it is the function of religious experience to bring out from and make prominent in the historical process disappears by a severely restricted view of the significance of history itself and by the intrusion of a monistic philosophy.

Yet the amazing kaleidoscope of Schleiermacher's mind presents a further colour scheme. In his treatment of *Dogmatics* the historical element is introduced to serve as a useful supplement to the experiential. With regard to the latter, injustice is often done to our author, as if in making the Christian consciousness the basis of doctrine he opened the door to endless individualism. Piety, we are bidden remember, shapes itself into a Church, "like every essential element of human nature in its development it will necessarily become a community" (*Gl.* par. 6). Related therefore to this larger area of experience Dogmatic Theology is an historical science, "the science of the interconnectedness of the doctrine which prevails in a Christian Church at a given time" (*Gl.* par. 19).

It may be objected that in such statements one defect has been exchanged for another. In the effort to avoid subjectivity and individualism we have deprived Dogmatics of its personal and normative character, reducing it to the level of a purely descriptive discipline which simply registers the beliefs held by a certain communion at a given time. But such a charge does not take into account the elusive qualifications of our author, for in sections explanatory of the definition just quoted there are sentences which redress the balance if they do not utterly resolve our doubt. Certainly the thought of the Church

and its contemporary needs, so to speak, exercised great influence upon his thought, but just because of this connection between Dogmatics and the furtherance of Church interests the theologian must be a believer in what he says and writes, himself possessed of the faith which he seeks to share with others. Unless his doctrine is to be simply a "private confession", he must also belong to a definite Church. His statements then will have their foundations deep and firmly set in the common Christian consciousness, in the actual faith by which men live.

The addition of the words "at a given time" should be given full weight, for they are meant to indicate the normative character of Dogmatics. Theology in this view is a progressive science. The textbooks of the seventeenth century no longer serve their purpose, for times have changed and other modes of expression are now required. Such alterations in their turn presuppose the receptivity and the freedom of individuals. While regard has to be paid to the general feeling of the Church, the theologian himself has rights and responsibilities in criticism and modification of traditional forms of thought.

In this fashion therefore historical theology slips out of the category of mere narrative, however important that may be, and draws its strength from the great sources of personal religion, the Holy Scriptures, the faith of the living Church of the time and the sanctified intelligence of the individual. Where difficulties remain in Schleiermacher's treatment of this and other questions, the clue may often be found in that objective Idealism, the very breath of his age, which asserts the ultimate unity of the Real and the Ideal and which tends therefore to equate in historical matters the descriptive and the normative method.

Our discussion has now, I trust, served its purpose, to display something of the richness, grandeur and variety of this great system. Almost of necessity in the thought of one who stands at the beginning of a new movement there are contradictions in his treatment of the four elements in his teaching which we have reviewed. The very lack of unity makes the doctrine more stimulating and arouses that sense of inspiration and gratitude which few students of Schleiermacher escape.

Many thorny problems have been touched upon, the definition of religion, the basis of theology, its relation to philosophy. The entrance of philosophy into the sphere of theology, one may feel, is necessary to supply or sharpen conceptions and modes

of arrangement, but, one must equally acknowledge, such intellectual material must be continually reviewed and tested by reference to the facts of the religious experience created and corrected and guided by revelation in Scripture and through the Spirit of Christ.

A constituent element in man's nature, religion has its source not in any one activity such as feeling, but in that combination of the finite and the infinite to be found in him. This truth Schleiermacher was striving to express amid the varying processes of his spiritual development and especially when he made Feeling one with the transcendental ground and source of man's other activities.

No estimate, however, of the work of this great theologian can be just which does not conclude with sharp emphasis upon his directing motive throughout: "I would, as it were, conduct you to the God that has become flesh." These words were uttered at the outset of his career in the *Discourses*, and in spite of many wanderings their light remained his guiding purpose, insisting as he did upon the central importance and the supremacy of Christ, and binding together in one single inseparable bond Redemption, Redeemer and redeemed.

A. W. McClymont.

Edinburgh.