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I. THEOLOGY THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION.¹

THERE are some things relating to the supply of ministers of the gospel about which the leading Christian denominations are substantially agreed. It would be strange if any serious difference existed as to the first and great question of the source of the supply. It is written, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Ministers are gifts to the church from her triumphant and ascended Lord. As the first verse cited from the Epistle to the Ephesians is a quotation from the sixty-eighth Psalm, the import of the statement of the apostle is that God has never left the church to its own resources in the matter of providing ministers, but has reserved to himself, under every dispensation, the prerogative of furnishing them. This divine arrangement keeps the church dependent on God in a matter upon which her very existence, as well as her growth and prosperity, depends; but it is a wise and gracious one, in that it secures with infallible certainty to the church, in answer to her prayers, an adequate supply of the right kind of ministers, and at the same time enables them to speak as the ambassadors of Christ. The second feature of the divine plan relates to the agency given to the church in the word

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of God in providing a supply of ministers. On this point the Scriptures are as clear as on the first. He has organized his people with reference to the work he has given them to do in this world. The church is not a mass of isolated individuals working separately under the impulses of the renewed nature, but a body of believers having a divine constitution and an organic life. God's people are required to pray the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. But to his church as represented in its courts, he has entrusted the high responsibility of judging of the divine call of candidates for the holy office, and of authorizing them in his name to preach the everlasting gospel. Moses was commanded to go and show his commission unto the elders of Israel. The Apostle Paul, though informed at the time of his commission that he was chosen of God to bear the gospel unto the Gentiles, was not at liberty to enter upon the work until the authorities of the church at Antioch, by direction of the Holy Ghost, fasted and prayed and laid hands on him. Nothing can be plainer than that ordination in the apostolic church was by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery and by prayer. The church has no right to commission any to preach but those who were first called of God, and none had any right to preach until they were commissioned by the church. On these vital points of order the churches are sound; but they have not been faithful. Something that looks very much like a church, lacking courts and ordination and sacraments, has been allowed to grow up and to spread all over the earth. It provides for the young and the mature. It has preachers, schools, and missions. It has, too, its system of training for the ministry. These things admonish us that there is need for the doctrine of the church to be emphasized in this age. There is a third feature of the work of providing ministers as to which the churches are approaching agreement. The plan of training candidates in seminaries of sacred learning, long familiar to Presbyterians, is receiving favor in the eyes of all the great denominations. It seems to have the right to claim the schools of the prophets under the law, and the company who waited on the teachings of our Lord as precedents. That the plan is not free from serious dangers all must admit;

but its manifold advantages commend it to the adoption of the church.

Among the many advantages which belong to a theological seminary, not the least is the opportunity for broad discipline furnished by a judicious distribution of the work of instruction. You have called me to give instruction in didactic and polemic theology in the Theological Seminary of South Carolina and Georgia, and you expect of me on this occasion some indication of my conception of the nature of the work given me to do, and of the method by which it can be done. In an effort to meet this expectation, your attention will be invited to a consideration of the definition of theology adopted in this seminary, and its implications.

Dr. Thornwell says (Lect. I., page 36): "I accept the definition now generally given, that theology is the science of religion; that is, it is the system of doctrine in its logical connection and dependence, which, when spiritually discerned, produces piety. There is a twofold cognition of divine truth: one natural, resulting from the ordinary exercise of our faculties of knowledge, and the other supernatural or spiritual, resulting from the gracious illumination of the Holy Ghost. The habit which corresponds to the first, like every other habit of science, is mere speculative knowledge. The habit which corresponds to the other is true religion. The doctrine, to use the expressive analogy of St. Paul, is the mould, and religion the image that it leaves upon the heart, which the spirit has softened to receive the impression. There is, first, the truth, and that is theology; there is, next, the cordial and spiritual apprehension of it, and that is the obedience of faith, which is synonymous with true religion. In other words, the truth objectively considered is theology; subjectively received, under divine illumination, it is religion. In relation to religion, therefore, theology is a science only in the objective sense. It denotes the system of doctrine, but not the mode of its apprehension."

Dr. Thornwell was a logician by nature and by severe discipline. Those who came under his instruction sometimes felt that he must be right in his conclusions when they could not follow with his clear vision all the steps that led to them. The embar-

rassment we feel in accepting the definition that theology is the science of religion is that natural cognition of divine truth does not produce piety; and yet natural cognition is the only basis of science. Dr. Thornwell reconciles the difficulty with the remark that "natural knowledge is the instrument of spiritual cognition. It is the seed which the Holy Spirit quickens into vital godliness. We must first know as *men* before we can know as *renewed* men." Dr. Dabney says: "Theology has come to be used commonly to describe the whole science of God's being and nature, and relations to the creature. The name is appropriate: Science of God." Dr. Dabney speaks with recognized authority. And I have reason for saying that, like Dr. Thornwell, he is good as well as great. But to my feeble powers this definition is attended with two serious difficulties. In the first place, it suggests the question of Zophar, the Naamathite: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do?" The best definition of God we have is the one contained in the *Shorter Catechism*: "God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Here the genus to which the substance of God is referred is spirit. So far there is no embarrassment in the thought that our knowledge may be reduced to science. But the difference is made up of those qualities which belong to spirit in its full and normal development, heightened beyond all bounds of conception by terms which are borrowed from God as an object of faith. Infinite, eternal, unchangeable, represent to our minds only negations, and yet they pervade and qualify the remaining terms of the difference—his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. So that while we follow the Scriptures in attributing to God the personal qualities which we find in ourselves, we do so only by way of analogy. God is not simply man upon a larger scale. And here arises our difficulty in defining theology as the science of God. The positive element which enters into our definition of God transcends the capacity of human speculation. Besides this, however, there is another consideration that makes me hesitate to accept the definition. It does not bring out with sufficient distinct-

ness the practical character of theological truth. Religion may be involved in God's relations to the creature, and yet the relations may continue and religion vanish. Or, if by relations be meant those that are superinduced by grace as well as those that are essential, then there is nothing in the definition that indicates the end contemplated. Dr. Hodge says: "Theology is the exhibition of the facts of Scripture in their proper order and relation, with the principles or general truths involved in the facts themselves, and which pervade and harmonize the whole." (Vol. I., page 19.) After reviewing the various definitions which have been given, he says: "We have, therefore, to restrict theology to its true sphere, as the science of the facts of divine revelation, so far as those facts concern the nature of God and our relation to him, as his creatures as sinners, and the subject of redemption." (Vol. I., page 21.) This definition limits the view to divine revelation, the medium of the knowledge of God. It would hardly be considered a precise definition of astronomy to say that it was the exhibition of the facts of the telescope in their proper order and relation, with the principles or general truths involved in the facts themselves, and which pervade and harmonize the whole. This limiting the view to the medium of obtaining a knowledge of God appears again in the division of theology into Natural and Revealed. The kind of theology is determined by the source from which it is derived. Dr. Hodge himself, while recognizing the old distinction and approving it, is careful to say, "The Scriptures contain all the facts of theology." (Vol. I., page 15.) "This is true," he adds, "because everything revealed in nature, and in the constitution of man concerning God and our relation to him, is contained and authenticated in Scripture. It is in this sense that 'the Bible, and the Bible alone, is the religion of Protestants.'" (Vol. I., page 11.) The more important consideration, however, in this connection, seems to be that the knowledge of God communicated to man has varied as man has stood in different relations to him. As long as man was holy, the communications made to him, both naturally and supernaturally, were of God as Creator and Moral Ruler, and the rule of life was personal obedience. When sin had changed man's condition from inno-

cence to condemnation, then the knowledge of God as a Redeemer was revealed to him, and the source of life was the obedience of another. This historical fact indicates that the end contemplated by God in making himself known, either naturally or supernaturally, is intimately associated with the things revealed, and consequently not to be omitted from any adequate definition of theology.

I would not be understood as venturing to criticise these masters in Israel. Dr. Dabney is regarded with reverence and gratitude by our whole Southern church because of what he is and what he has done for the cause of Christ. Dr. Hodge's great work on Systematic Theology is used in this seminary to supplement the Lectures of Dr. Thornwell. My sole purpose in referring to them has been to indicate why I shall adhere to the definition of theology adopted by Dr. Thornwell, and confirmed in its place in our seminary by my illustrious predecessor, the Rev. Dr. Girardeau. It is preferred, *First*, because it includes all the terms of theology—God, man, and the God-man; *Secondly*, because it covers all the relations involved in theology—Creator, Ruler, Redeemer; *Thirdly*, because it enables us to make a true distinction between the natural and the supernatural in religion; *Fourthly*, because it has the elements of a real definition—knowledge is the genus, and religion the specific difference; in the last place, because it is suggested by the use of the covenants as a mode of revelation. The opening paragraph of Chapter VII. of *The Confession of Faith* says: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that, although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant."

Having indicated the definition of theology, it remains to consider its bearing on the matter to be taught, the method of instruction, the end to be sought, and the means necessary to attain it.

As to the first point, the force of the definition in determining the matter of instruction, we remark: The possibility of religion

depends upon the existence of a personal God. Religion consists essentially in affections, such as love, fear, veneration, and reverence. Its highest expression is that of communion with God. We speak to him in the language of prayer, penitence, faith, and thanksgiving. He speaks to us in his word, his providence, and in the communications of his grace. As such, religion implies an object, and an object of a peculiar kind. An abstract principle, a blind force, a stern and irresistible necessity, might be an object of dread and terror, but it would be absurd to pray to it, to trust in it, or to love it. Man was made in the image of God, and he must find in that image a reflection of those qualities necessary to the Being with whom he communes, to whom he gives his reverence, and in whom he finds his blessedness. The distinguishing characteristic of man as man may be summed up in the attributes of reason, conscience, and will. These are not material, but spiritual, properties, and they distinguish man as a person. All other creatures upon this earth are things. Man is like God in that he is a personal spirit. The Scriptures seem to use the expression "the image of God" in a looser sense to denote personal qualities. What it is to be a person we are not able to say. We can only mark the conditions on which the belief of it, as the unknown cause of obvious phenomena, is developed in consciousness. The first circumstance that distinguishes this notion is that of individuality. Every instance of knowledge is the affirmation of a self, on the one hand, and a something that is not self, on the other. There is the subject knowing and the object known. But there may be individuals that are not persons. There are other conditions essential to the development of the notion, which may be summed up in intelligence, conscience, and will. Self is affirmed only in consciousness, and consciousness is the property only of intelligence. It is the prerogative of man in distinction from the brutes to attribute his thoughts and impressions to himself—to say, "I think," or "I feel." It is, however, in the sphere of morals, where man is regarded as the subject of rights, and held to be the responsible author of his own acts—the sphere in which conscience and will are involved—that the notion is most distinctly developed. The power and liberty

of choice, the power of originating motion, the sense of responsibility and assertion of right, carry in them the notion of personal being. When, therefore, we affirm the personality of God, we mean to assert that he is distinct from all other objects; that he is not the universe, either in its matter or its form, its seminal principle or its final development. We mean to say that he is a pure spirit, possessed of consciousness and will, who acts from purpose and from choice. As such, he can enter into communion with our spirits. Mind does hold communion with mind. He can make known to men his attitude in relation to them. He can enter into their souls and warm and irradiate them with the tokens of his favor. He can hear their prayers and receive their praises. He can be to them the source of blessedness. Let us not forget, however, in the enthusiasm this thought inspires, that the image of God consists essentially in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Personal spirit is necessary on the part of man to the possession of the divine image; but, strictly speaking, it is not the image. The Bible is clear as to the moral character of the image of God. God made man holy, and in this he resembled the character of his Maker. His holiness manifested itself in spiritual discernment and a disposition to universal obedience. And so, while the knowledge of God makes religion possible by affording an object to which worship may be addressed, the holy nature of God—his infinite and glorious perfections, of which it is the summary expression—gives an object worthy to be revered and trusted, and competent to engage all the powers of man, as well as to meet every craving and aspiration of his immortal spirit.

Our definition, however, is not satisfied with an object of worship. It involves relations as well. Theology has to do, not only with the being and nature of God, but also with the relations on which he bases his intercourse with man. Here our attention is arrested by the fact that the work of creation was finished, and some interval allowed, before mention is made of any special act of providence toward man. The mind is allowed to dwell for a moment at least upon the natural relations subsisting betwixt God and the creature. All orders of created existence sustained

one common relation to God. They were his servants. As the property of him who made them, they were subject to his control. But man was distinguished, as a rational creature, by the imposition of a moral law as the rule of his life. The holy law was not something added by revelation after his creation, but was written upon his heart in the very act of creation. It belonged to his constitution as a moral creature, so that man came into existence as a servant under moral government. It is not difficult to gather from these data the features of the situation. The characteristic principle of moral government is distributive justice. When rewards and punishments are distributed according to the personal good or ill desert of every subject, the government is moral. This precludes the representative principle; it conditions the favor of God on perpetual obedience; and it leaves no room for recovery from ruin, if it comes at any stage of man's immortal career. What liberty of approach to God was allowed under the relation of a servant under pure moral government, we are not told. As long as man remained innocent he was not restrained by guilty fear. But there is, in the nature of things, a marked difference between the intercourse of a father with a son and that of a master with a servant. Under such a relation religion must necessarily have been of the legal type, and access to God restrained. The goodness of God was manifested in the lofty endowments he bestowed on man, and in the headship he gave him over the new creation. The righteousness of the relation has been demonstrated, *first*, by the fact that obedience to the law has, in two conspicuous instances, been made necessary to man's elevation to the position of sonship; and *secondly*, by the further fact that in the second probation the conditions were severe. But, righteous and honorable as the position under pure moral government was, it is evident that the divine goodness contemplated from the first a nearer and tenderer relationship for man. It was always God's purpose to turn the servant into a son. The first special act of providence God exercised toward man in the estate wherein he was created was the institution of the covenant of works. In this covenant the principles of moral government were modified in two important particulars. Probation was limited both as

to time and as to persons. Adam, the mature man, endowed with spiritual discernment and a will inclined to the law of God, was made the representative of his race. As such, the question of destiny must be settled before any of his descendants should come into being. A temporary obedience was made equivalent to perpetual innocence. The gracious purpose sought by the arrangement was the justification and adoption of Adam and his race. That the gracious purpose failed, and failed so disastrously, was not the fault of the covenant and the principles employed. Nor was the goodness of God exhausted by the one effort which had been so signally frustrated by the sin of man. Before the guilty pair were banished from Paradise an intimation was given, in the first promise, of that amazing scheme of grace which we call the covenant of redemption, the full development of which spans the history of time. In this glorious covenant there is no failure. The principles employed are the same, but the representative is the eternal Son of God. On the ground of his obedience his people are justified. Being justified, their trial necessarily ceases; and the moment trial ceases in this way, the position of a servant also ceases. A new relation must supervene, in which the sentiments of the heart correspond to the changed relations. Adoption is grounded in justification. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." What is implied in sonship we may not be able fully to conceive. Yet there are some features of the relation with which we are familiar. The ground of the son's right to the blessing he enjoys is the father's love, and the principle on which he possesses it is that of inheritance and not of debt. The faults of a son are chastened in love, whereas the transgressions of a servant are punished judicially. The standing of a son is secure, because his relation to the law is changed. He is forever free from its condemnation, and its holy principles are wrought by grace into the texture of his soul. The son has free access to the father's presence. The communion of a son with his father is full and unconstrained. Surely we have in this relation all that religion, viewed as communion with God, demands. When I see how persistently divine goodness has sought to estab-

lish this relation, I cannot escape the conviction that theology should be so taught as to promote fellowship with God. And when I see how divine wisdom has used the covenant as a scheme for the justification and adoption of man, both in his condition of innocence and of sin, I cannot resist the belief that what may be called the federal theology lies at the foundation of vital godliness.

The bearing of our definition on the method to be employed in theology will next engage our attention. This may be dispatched in a few words. It was not an accident that the great expounder of the inductive method in philosophy was a citizen of Protestant England. With Protestants the Bible is the rule of faith. The Bible opens with an account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. In the six days God reduced the chaos to order, and adapted the laws of nature to the physical, intellectual, and religious condition of man. As he made the world, so he continues to uphold it by his power, and to govern it consistently with the constitution he originally gave it. The world is separate from God, and yet dependent upon him. Creation and providence are the methods by which God executes his eternal decrees. The universe is the effect of the divine will. It is an effect that might or might not have been. Its nature and constitution are alike contingent. This is a very different doctrine of the universe from Pantheism, and it leads to a very different method of inquiry in philosophy. Any system that identifies God with his works must involve an *a priori* or deductive method in science. Given the principle of being as God, and all things can be deduced from him with as rigorous certainty as the propositions of geometry from the definitions of the science. He is necessary cause, they are necessary effect. He is necessary substance, they are necessary affections. But on the supposition of an intelligent Creator, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will, the problem of philosophy is different. It becomes an inquiry into the nature and attributes of God as these are manifested in his works. We know what he is by what he does. The process is inductive. And what is true of nature is equally true of his word. What nature is to the man of science, the Bible is to the theologian. It is a storehouse of revealed

facts. The truths of revelation are scattered over the pages of the Bible like the facts of science over the face of nature. When gathered, they are found to arrange themselves into a harmonious system of truth. The house that Solomon built for the Lord, "when it was building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building." The more candidly and thoroughly the induction is made, and the more the facts are allowed to arrange themselves according to their inherent laws, the more successful will be the effort of the theologian. It is a demonstration of the Augustinian system that it is the only one consistent with all the facts or truths taught in the Bible. Let it not be said that this gives a tame view of the work of the theologian. It was no disparagement to the genius and skill of the builders of Solomon that they sought to realize the pattern showed to Moses in the Mount. Nor do Bacon and Newton suffer because they refused to follow the barren method of more ambitious philosophers. The ablest theologians of the Reformed Church, from Calvin down to our day, have wrought with material drawn fresh from the word of God.

In the third place, our definition indicates the purpose to be kept in view in teaching theology. We speak here of the teacher in his work with his classes. Theological seminaries ought to be fountains of religious literature. They ought to elevate the general intelligence of the church. And they should aid in settling the perplexing problems the church has to encounter in every generation. But the chief business of these sacred institutions is to train candidates for the ministry. What, then, should be the ruling purpose in the department of systematic theology? Should it be to make accomplished theologians, or to prepare able and successful preachers? It cannot be doubted that the former end may be secured without the latter. The human mind is logical. Some books in the Bible state divine truth in systematic form. The whole Bible contains a system of truth. It is possible by diligence to construct from the Scriptures a theology, to state and defend it. All this may be done as a mere intellectual exercise. The truth may neither sanctify the heart of the student, nor move

him to compassion for lost men. No one will advocate this process. Every one will say, it is one of the dangers that should be carefully avoided. It does not follow, however, because it is possible to be scientific theologians, and at the same time be very dry and unfruitful preachers, that men can be able and successful preachers without being theologians. This is a serious mistake. Great preachers like Chalmers and Edwards were also great theologians. Groups of great preachers are found in periods when the church is called in the providence of God to contend earnestly for the faith. The preaching of our Lord's apostles gives no countenance to the opinion that ignorance of divine truth is a condition of success in the ministry. The instances of superior success on the part of ignorant preachers are deceptive. Some are really ignorant, and only appear to be greatly successful. The illusion is dispelled when time has tested the nature of the results. There are, however, really great results from apparently ignorant men. Here the mistake is as to the intelligence of the preacher. John Bunyan was put in prison by the Duke of Bedford of his day. The Duke of Bedford of our generation erects a monument to his memory. It will be found, wherever a great work of permanent value has been accomplished by a rude and uncultivated man, that he had a well-digested system of divine truth. While uninformed in many directions, the word of God was as a "burning fire shut up in his bones." There is a growing impatience on the part of the churches with doctrinal preaching. The test of a minister now is rather *how* he preaches than *what* he preaches. It is not a healthy symptom. And yet it has had the effect in some quarters to disparage the chair of systematic theology. With us the influence has not been felt. And I am hopeful enough to believe that theology can be so taught that preachers will still go forth who can say with David and Paul, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken."

We come now to the last suggestion contained in the definition. This relates to the means necessary to accomplish the purpose of which we have spoken. Here the involuntary exclamation breaks forth, Who is sufficient for these things? I suppose there never lived a man who would not shudder if called upon to under-

take such a work. After all, however, sufficiency does not lie in man. Some men, by reason of special gifts, are more suitable instruments than others; but it is not by might nor by power. The promise of the Holy Spirit, to teacher and pupils alike, is the only ground of hope in so vast an undertaking. He alone can give spiritual discernment. He alone can soften the heart to receive the impression of revealed truth. The first discourse of our Lord was preached from the text, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel." Our Lord's disciples were but bruised reeds and smoking flax until they received the Holy Ghost. Let it be the earnest prayer of every lover of this seminary that the Holy Spirit will abide here, and lead us into all truth. Then shall her old men dream dreams, and her young men shall see visions. Then every scribe, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, will bring forth out of his treasures things new and old.

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