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must meet these insolent pretenders with deserved rebuke, and unmask the shallowness of their claims. Doubtless their feeling is that truth itself is mighty and must prevail; but, honourable as the sentiment is, we think it susceptible of abuse. There are pachydermatous minds, which are opaque to truth, unless error be visited with deserved severity and exposure. It would help to abate the nuisance if the quacks were given to understand that their manifestoes will be promptly and vigorously dealt with. Irreligion is a great recommendation to a work; but it cannot be allowed to serve as logic, science, philosophy, and advertisement all at once.

## CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND CURRENT THOUGHT.

An Inaugural Address by Professor Francis L. Patton, D.D.

**I**NTEND to notice some of the leading questions which are of present interest in the sphere of religious opinion, and it will be convenient to group them under five divisions, viz. :— Christian theology, as related to secular science; as exclusive; as formulated; as progressive; as symbolical.

### I. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS RELATED TO SECULAR SCIENCE.

Theology, as didactic, occupies a well-defined area. It does not profess to teach botany, to decide doubtful questions in geology, to account for the origin of species, to discuss rival schools of ethics, or adjudicate between conflicting systems of psychology. Theology as apologetic, on the other hand, touches secular science at a great many points, and the theologian is brought face to face with scientific hypotheses, and becomes of necessity a party to controversy.

It is a noteworthy fact that the questions in science which awaken the most general attention are those which concern our religious beliefs, and the interest felt in them is due largely to their theological relations. For there are some physicists whose devotion to nature rises to ecstasy when they have hit upon a fact which they suppose will damage

an ancient faith. These are the men who suppose that the laurels of Galileo and Luther are to grow green again on their brows, and that under their leadership the world is to witness a completed reformation in a discarded Bible. Religion helps the sale of scientific books more than is acknowledged. For outside of the narrow circle of scientific specialists the ordinary facts of science would produce but little impression. It is only when men go below the surface of mere phenomenal existence, and strike the foundation granite of our religious nature, that they attract general attention. Men are religious at bottom, and the book which attacks our religious being is sure of being read by him who is anxious to oust his conscience, as well as by him who stands in timid apprehension that science will one day rob him of his God. The aspirant for popular scientific fame has his best ally in our religious nature. This it is which sells his books and crowds his lecture room. And it is this same religious nature which has invested some questions with an importance out of all proportion to their intrinsic value, until the pigeon fancier is cited as a damaging witness against the inspired account of the origin of species.

It is useless to deny that scientific con

clusions are gaining ground which are in open conflict with the Bible. Nor is it the wisest policy for Christian apologists to announce their readiness to show the possible harmony of these hypotheses with revelation. This is only a respectable way of beating a retreat. It is to fire and fall back. The true course is to give up, or make a stand. And the theologian is bound to protest against those conclusions in secular science which ignore, contradict, or exclude, Christian theology.

As these three categories seem to comprehend the questions at issue between science and Scripture, let us notice them separately.

*Conclusions which ignore Christian Theology.*

There is a growing impatience with theological conceptions of the universe. Theology, we are reminded, is holding her sceptre in palsied hands, and her dominion, like the Pope's, is suffering from the encroachment of the secular power. Theism fares no better than polytheism at the hands of advancing science. The reign of law leaves no room for Providence. The priests of Baal have appeared in the *role* of Elijah, and, with something of Elijah's sarcasm, are proposing a prayer gauge.

But we take the liberty to say, that the assertors that religion is on the wane are at fault in their arithmetic. Human wisdom has not all segregated into a scientific lump, leaving only fools to go to church. Christian missions and Christian munificence testify that the world is not losing faith in God. But if it were, universal atheism would not dethrone Him. Though, one by one, the believers in God should renounce their faith or pass away, until the last survivor, like Humboldt's Aturian parrot,\* should find

\* "There still lives, and it is a singular fact, an old parrot in Maypures which cannot be understood, because, as the natives assert, it speaks the language of the Atures—an extinct tribe of Indians, whose last refuge was the rocks of the foaming cataract of the Orinoco."—Humboldt, quoted in *Maudsley's Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, p. 9.

himself speaking in a strange language to the men of his time, yet he might well give his solitary testimony and remain unshaken in his faith.

And, if there is a God, it is absurd to sneer at theological conceptions of the universe: for faith in Him must of necessity colour our ideas of the world. If by that causal judgment, which is the birthright of every man, we are led up to God, then the road which leads us up must take us down again to a consideration of the works of His hand. The facts of science are corroborative of theism. The uniformity of nature, the unity of force, the unknowable power which baffles analysis, are in exact correspondence with the Scripture doctrine of one Personal God; and it is unseemly for men who confess their ignorance of the agency which is behind phenomena, to scout theism without study. Nescience has no right to ridicule faith. For in that a man says I do not know, he affirms that the theist may not be so far astray; and while the being of God is with him a matter of doubt, his cosmogony can only be provisional, and his ridicule of a theistic cosmogony is weak and wicked.

*Conclusions which contradict Christian Theology.*

Theism conditions revelation, and revelation strengthens theism. The two are mutually auxiliary. Christian theology proceeds on the assumption of a revelation. The Bible must expect free handling, and win confidence by standing scrutiny. Scientists have the right to show, if they can, that its claims are not established, or to break down its authority by proving it false. But this cannot be done by confronting it with an unproved hypothesis. The attempt is made, notwithstanding, to displace the teachings of Scripture by hypotheses which are not only unproved, but which in the nature of the case are unprovable. It surely

does not require much penetration to see that there is a wide *hiatus* between the proposition man *may* have developed out of a monkey, and the proposition man *must* have so originated. The chasm between the may have been and the must have been is to be spanned before there can be a strong case against the Bible. There are some questions, and this may be one of them, which, aside from revelation, cannot be conclusively settled; and, for this reason, theology is, properly speaking ancillary to science, as furnishing material for more complete induction. The milestone which informs us of our distance from a neighbouring city, leaves us quite in the dark respecting the direction in which the mileage is to be counted; and so, looking on a brother man who holds a position quite remote from the two extremes of human life, it might be difficult to say whether he was moving downward from purity to barbarism, or upward from a savage state to civilisation. It is revelation which sheds light on man's primitive condition, and furnishes reply to Lubbock and Tylor.

*Conclusions which exclude Christian Theology.*

The doctrine antipodal to theism is evolution. And evolution is a device for banishing God. According to this theory life is spontaneously generated from dead matter; the higher forms emerge out of the lower, and man is the long result. Primitive man was a savage as we might expect him to have been, and civilisation is a growth. The moral intuitions are only hereditary experiences, and mind is only matter which thinks that it thinks. Evolutionists do not all carry the theory to the same length. Mr. Wallace does not allow that Darwinism accounts for man's body, to say nothing of his soul. Mr. Mivart holds that bodywise he has monkey ancestors, but takes refuge in creationism, and maintains that God is the

Father of his spirit. Life is the unit of Mr. Darwin's scientific speculations, and though Huxley would not say *credo* to the doctrine of *Abiogenesis* he leans very decidedly towards it.

The love of unity, one can easily see, will have a tendency to make those who favour evolution at all, desirous of referring everything to it, and Mr. Herbert Spencer has carried the premises of evolution to their logical results, and his constructive mind has reduced to symmetry the labours of specialists in the different fields of inquiry.

The conclusions reached by this method are not only contradictory to theology, they are exclusive of theology. Evolution assigns mind a place in physics, and when mental science becomes a department of physiology, faith ends, and scepticism reigns. Morals cease to be authoritative, when right and wrong resolve themselves into questions of utility, and are compared to the instinct of the retriever.

In the hands of the physiologist, the thinking subject is reduced to zero. Thought is as mechanical as digestion, and one is as moral as the other. The idea of God becomes a delusion, religion a farce, and the only thing man has to look forward to is a coffin and a grave. Such is the effect of mere phenomenal studies that men have come seriously to believe that matter can develop into conscious life; can invent the hypothesis of a God; can assert that it is mind, and persistently challenge refutation; can believe that its actions are voluntary, though in reality as mechanical as the motions of a clock; can believe that it shapes its conduct in accordance with the will of its hypothetical God; can be the subject of emotions which irresistibly suggest immortality, and that, on the strength of a belief in an immortal life, it can foster hope and listen to entreaty. There are men who, denying God, mind, personality, will, can believe that matter has developed these conceptions and has been

the dupe of itself, that human history has been a wholesale cheat, and that the agencies which have revolutionised states and written poems—which have won victories and discoursed philosophy, which have made laws and painted Madonnas—are resolvable into the forces of chemistry and magnetism.

There was a point in the retrogressive journey of doubt beyond which Descartes could not go. These men, however, are trying hard to think, and at the same time doubt the thinking itself. But, by a necessity of thought, they are compelled, in the act of advancing their ideas, to embody a protest against them. They write books to prove that the personality which conditions all they say has no existence, and to prove to men (whose personality they take for granted in the fact that they address them) that their personality is a cheat. How mind can manage to devour itself is a curious problem, over which we must not linger. Enough has been said to show that the domain of theology is contiguous to the realm of science, and that the border land is a battle-ground.

It would appear, then, that the dispute between secular science and Christian theology cannot be settled by a policy of non-intrusion. There was strife between the herdsmen of Abram and those of Lot because they stood on common ground, and the conflict between Scripture and science comes of their dealing with the same questions. The dispute, unlike the patriarchal one, cannot be settled by a re-distribution of territory; for physical science, as we have seen, with a greediness exceeding Lot's, claims undisputed possession of the entire realm of knowledge.

As little can we accord with the sentiment that theologians have no right to scientific opinions. To do so would be to allow that the theist repeats his creed and says his prayers under scientific sanction. If a man knows that it is day, he need pay little attention to him who avers that it is night;

and if a man knows, on God's authority, that Adam was made in the likeness of God, he may answer Darwin with an indignant negative.

A railway collision has been facetiously described as the attempt of two trains to pass each other on the same track. Science and theology, dealing with the same questions, have come to a standstill. We shall continue to claim for theology the right of way, until the arguments for the inspiration of the Scriptures have been candidly examined and fairly set aside.

Besides, if special scientific culture is the pre-requisite of a questioning reception of a scientific hypothesis, it is useless for scientific men to write books for the purpose of convincing the lay reader. Let the scientific dogma go forth with the claim of infallibility at once, and let the furnace of ridicule be heated for the theological Daniel who refuses assent. No, indeed. Logic is a universal science, and men who understand its laws can tell whether the facts which are adduced in any case will support the inferences based upon them. Exceptional culture in science is no more necessary, however desirable, as the condition of an opinion on the value of a scientific hypothesis, than it is necessary that a man should be a thief in order that he may be an intelligent juryman in a larceny case.

Christian theology has a right to be recognised as an element in human knowledge. And when men refuse to recognise God as Ruler and Revealed, they lack the true inductive spirit. It is not scientific to adopt a theory covering a class of unexamined facts which the theory will not explain. A theory which meets a protest in a persistent personality, which has no explanation of moral convictions, no answer to the claims of Scripture, no mode of accounting for the origin and growth of the Christian Church, is surely not a satisfactory theory of the universe. The theist, however, finds him-

self in possession of a consistent faith. He accepts his personality as a fact, the laws of belief as veracious, and moral intuitions as obligatory. Belief in God is the necessary result of the constitution of his nature. Revelation does not surprise him, and because attested, is accepted. Its pages throw light on the genesis of man, the origin of marriage, the permanence of species, and they have scientific value. It is surely more likely that the theistic hypothesis is true, and that a theory which is at war with the universal beliefs of mankind, and which stands only by wholesale discredit of testimony, is false. If probability were conceded to be the guide of life, and if, as the advocates of an improbable hypothesis, the men alluded to did not assume the attitude which justifies scepticism on the ground of the barest possibility, theism would be the unanimous faith of the world.

May we not hope, however, that the time is coming, and is not so far away, when the student of physical science will see that theism furnishes the material for the widest and the safest induction, and that he is the true philosopher who reads the universe as the written thought of God, and, under the two categories of God in nature and God in history, subordinates all knowledge?

#### II. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS EXCLUSIVE.

Mere theism is minus the gospel. And we must deal now with a controversy between theism and Christianity.

Thanks are due to Max Müller and other students of comparative theology for the services they have rendered in showing that the religious sentiments are part of the original dowry of humanity; that monotheism was man's ancient faith; that human history is an apostasy, and not an improvement. It is a pity that in helping theism, they have hurt Christianity; that in co-ordinating, instead of contrasting Christianity with other religions, they have declared

against the very principle in defence of which the martyrs shed their blood. It was Christianity as an exclusive religion which the Apostles preached, and to rob it of this character is to work its ruin. It is a religion which, if not exclusive, is one for which the world has no need. It stands on such an exceptional basis that it must be proved false or allowed unchallenged authority. In the great fact whence dates its origin, and in which consists its significance, are found its finality and its exclusiveness. Men show plainly by the arguments they use that they do not assign the proper value to this fact.

Christian exclusiveness, we are told, is unscientific. Does not knowledge come by comparison, and how, without study of other religions, can we affirm that Christianity is entitled to pre-eminence? The Deity of Christ, we reply, can be determined without the aid of Sanscrit, and without wading through the three hundred and twenty-five ponderous volumes of Buddhist Scriptures. To require us to withhold assent to this great doctrine until we have pursued a course of reading in Comparative Theology, is as absurd as it would be to require us to suspend judgment respecting the Binomial theorem, until we had studied the Chinese classics. The Bible gives all the material we need for reaching a conclusion respecting the claims of Christ, and if Christ is God, the religion which He came down on earth to teach, and which He commanded his disciples to carry round the world, must, without controversy, be supreme.

It is not from arrogance or prejudice, it is not because we are tenacious of an ancient faith, it is not that we have the unreasonable conservatism which makes us dread to leave an old anchorage; still less is it through lack of love, that we refuse to embrace a Catholicity which will put the Bible on a level with the Vedas, or count among the people of God the Buddhist and the

Mohammedan. Nor are appeals to sentiment likely to have much weight with men whose religion is rooted in an emphatic and uncompromising conviction respecting the Deity of Christ and His atoning death. The point at issue is purely one of fact. If we are calling Jesus God, in error, by all means we should be made aware of the mistake. But if this faith is true then the noblest charity is that which looks squarely in the face the appalling fact of heathenism.

Some try to set aside the exclusiveness of Christianity by a comparative estimate of morality. And when it is shown that old religions are not so immoral as they have been supposed, nor ancient faith so far astray; and, above all, when picked examples of exemplary morality are met with, it is argued that since we have undervalued heathenism we have over-estimated Christianity, and that religions which embrace such splendid possibilities as are actualised in Socrates and Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus, deserve better treatment than uncompromising contrast with Christianity.

To argue thus, is to mistake the ground on which Christianity bases its exceptional claim. The apostles did not go forth merely or mainly as the teachers of a code, but as the heralds of a gospel. They did not base their own position of contrast on their superior morals, but, on the contrary, the great fact on which they insisted was that "*sin* had drawn the bar sinister across the broad shield of the handiwork of God."\* and that, as the result, the entire race was involved in a condemnation from which nothing could save them but the blood of Christ.

Nor does it shake our faith in the exclusiveness of Christianity to be reminded of the common elements held in solution by it and other religions. It is not strange at all that Christianity lays claim to exceptional honour, on the ground of the exceptional fact which

\* Ellicott. *Destiny of the Creature*, p. 8.

differentiates it, particularly when that fact is the everlasting union of God and man in the person of Christ. To affirm of two things their identity or equality on the ground of elements common to both, would not in other departments of knowledge be counted as good reasoning. Diamond is not charcoal, though both contain carbon; and strychnine is not a wholesome beverage, though its elements enter into the composition of tea.

Deep in the pagan's conscience, we are told, and behind the polytheism which directs his worship and crowds his literature, is the belief in one God. But the doctrine of the Divine unity even in its purity will not save men. The heathen holds in a childish form the maturer faiths of the Christian, Max Müller says. But these maturer faiths, we reply, are not justifying faiths. The heathen is sincere!—yes, and his depravity is seen in the fact that the worst sins can secure the approval of his conscience. The heathen had longed for an Incarnation. But hunger is not food. They believe in expiation. But *their* sacrifices are not *the* sacrifice.

Christianity conditions salvation on faith in Jesus Christ. Hence its exclusive character and aggressive spirit. If the exclusiveness of Christianity is denied, obvious inferences follow. The conversion of the heathen must then appear to be at least an undertaking of questionable wisdom. Why preach the gospel in India if the gospel of Buddha leads to the same goal as that of Christ? And then, why is Christianity of more value to us than the heathen? Why perpetuate it when we cease to propagate it? Or, why was it of more importance that our forefathers should have been enlightened than that we should proceed with the evangelization of the world—in a word, what would the world have lost had Christianity perished with its founder? Deny the exclusiveness of Christianity, and, so far as

redemption is concerned, it would not be hard to conclude that the Incarnation was an uncalled-for event. If the religion of Jesus is co-ordinated with the other religions of the world, no good reason can be given for its dominant attitude and uncompromising spirit, and the marvel will be that a system originating in so pure a mind should prove so arrogant. But nothing has been said in our day against Christian exclusiveness, which might not, with equal cogency, have applied to the Apostle Paul. It would suffice, therefore, to appeal to his conversion and career, as furnishing conclusive testimony in favour of the position here maintained. For, while the latter was shaped by a dominant conviction that the blood of Christ alone can save the soul, the former was associated with events which no man in his senses could misapprehend. The miracle which led Paul to preach the faith he once destroyed, left him, at the same time, with an unquestioning conviction that the road to Calvary is the only road to heaven.

The whole discussion may be made to turn on this proposition: Faith in Jesus Christ is essential to salvation; and if this is sustained, the exclusiveness of Christianity will be established. This proposition will be denied by two classes, specifically distinct; that is to say, by those who believe in the atonement, but deny that its efficacy is limited by faith, and by those who, denying the divinity of Christ, deny the atonement. Let us glance at the position assumed by each.

If atonement in design and effect covers every human being, then the work of the Church was done when Christ went up to heaven. How then, is the command to preach explained, and why is salvation associated with repentance and faith? Trinitarian universalism is a mixture of faith and scepticism. It receives heaven on the authority of the Bible, but it rejects the doctrine of hell, though taught on the same

authority. It tries to defend itself by defending God. But in vain. For, if we depend on the Bible for our knowledge of God's character, we must take as an element in His character the Bible doctrine of retribution.

The next great class are those who deny the Deity of Christ; some by interpreting the Bible, and others by throwing the Bible away.

Exegesis will lend no support to Unitarianism. Jesus is more than man. For, to say nothing of His matchless life, His pure doctrine, His original plan, His wide-spread success, the miracles He wrought, the prerogatives He claimed, and the attributes ascribed to Him, it is enough to appeal to the historic fact that He rose from the dead, and rose in vindication of His Divine claims. Did He rise because He was God, or did God raise Him from the dead to give emphasis to a lie?

The resurrection of Christ answers Socinianism and Arianism at once. It proves that Christ was more than man, and that He was not less than God.

Rationalism deals in a more summary way with this central truth. And it has reduced to its lowest terms the question concerning the person of Christ. Jesus is a myth or He is God. Let us raise the question, What is that Ideal Form which we see in the four gospels? Were the Evangelists biographers or artists? We learn from Greek mythology how a corrupt age produced corrupt ideals, and how these, when fixed in marble or in verse, became the educators of the people. Are we, likewise, to regard the character of Jesus as the product of the human mind? Is Christianity only an elevated mythology? If this were a legitimate conclusion, it must effectually close the debate on the exclusiveness of Christian theology. To this question it were enough, however, to reply that an ugly face cannot cast a comely shadow, and that a character of such matchless beauty as

Jesus of the Gospels never could have been the reflection of the religious consciousness of a people like the Jews.

But with more force it may be further argued that the gospels have been traced back to a point so nearly contemporaneous with the events described that it would have been as impossible for them to have gained credence, had they been false, as it would be for the *Battle of Dorking* to pass for authentic history. Stubborn facts have answered Strauss, and vindicated the historic claims of the four Evangelists.

Recognising, therefore, the true humanity of Jesus, we stand in an attitude similar to that of the doubting disciple, who, in the act of realising the manhood of his Lord, rose to the full confession of His Deity.

Christ is God, and therefore Christ's gospel is uncompromising. The Deity of Christ is *the* doctrine of our faith. With it Christianity stands or falls.

### III. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS FORMULATED.

The Bible is the source of theological knowledge, but the truths taught in it are unmethodised. No single passage gives an exhaustive statement of any doctrine, and the doctrines are not presented in their relations to one another. In saying this, the organic unity of Scripture is not overlooked. The candid reader of the Bible cannot fail to regard it as the progressive unfolding of a plan, and to see that through it, from Genesis to Revelation, "the same increasing purpose runs." But this unity is apparent in the genetic relation of its parts, rather than in the logical relation of its doctrines.

When the teachings of Scripture respecting a truth have been collated, and their equivalent expressed in a formula, we have a *dogma*. These truths, or dogmas, brought together in logical subordination, and more or less elaborately discussed, constitute a *system*. It will suit my purpose to distinguish

between theology as dogmatic and theology as systematic, and to treat them separately.

1. *Theology as dogmatic*.—Our acquaintance with current literature need not be extensive in order that we may learn with what aversion dogma is regarded by some.

And this aversion is traceable, we think, to three main causes: Depreciation of doctrine; mistaken zeal for Scripture phraseology; and false inferences, from the imperfection of our knowledge and the limitation of our faculties.

#### *Depreciation of Doctrine.*

Dislike of a truth very commonly takes the form of a dislike of the formula which embodies it. And, without denying that strict loyalty to Scripture is compatible with a desire for a re-statement of some formulas, objections to dogma are nevertheless traceable mainly to the slight store set upon doctrinal truth. But, why should doctrine be disliked? Doctrine professes to be truth, and truth should not be lightly esteemed. Matthew Arnold ridicules our definite doctrinal conceptions. But if there is material for making them definite, why not do so? Why wish to cloud what God has made clear? If God has made the theological landscape stand out, in sharp outline, in the clear atmosphere of revelation, why wreath it in mists? We are in possession of material for definite theological knowledge, and when a man like Matthew Arnold tells us that the personality of God, and the resurrection of Christ, are not parts of his creed, nor properly parts of any man's creed, he is teaching a system of theological nescience which borders on atheism.

Doctrine is of great importance—we propose to show—and, if it is, the correct expression of it cannot be a matter of indifference.

Doctrine constitutes the basis of authoritative ethics. Moral obligation involves the factors of a personal self related to a personal

God. Deny self-hood by materialising mind, and obligation ceases. A man will take short cuts to justice, and gratify private revenge, when he is persuaded that after death he has nothing to fear. Deny God,\* and what then is the ground of obligation? You may tell a man that in the long run it will be to his interest to do right, but you cannot generate obligation out of the love of happiness; and you cannot rear an authoritative system of ethics on an atheistic basis.

Practice grows out of doctrine—a more concrete way of putting the foregoing idea. We pray, because we believe in God's personality. We send missionaries, because we believe in salvation by the blood of Christ. Surely the doctrine cannot be of less value than the practice which grows out of it. It is a mistake, therefore, to make disparaging comparisons between men of thought and men of action. It is not by any means an unimportant work, to defend our primary beliefs, or to maintain the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, when the possibility of Christianity is conditioned on the veracity of the former, and the validity of the latter. Nor is it necessary that doctrinal knowledge should make men juiceless, or prevent them from being practical. And if, as Mr. Froudet asserts, there has been a divorce effected between doctrines and morals, the pulpit is to blame. For the whole sphere of practical

\* "When the National Assembly drew up its famous declaration of the rights of man, in 1789, 'write the name of God at the head of the declaration,' said the Abbe Gregoire, 'or you leave them without foundation, and you make right the equivalent of force. You declare not the rights of man, but the rights of the strongest. You inaugurate the reign of violence.' The Assembly refused. Gregoire was correct in his judgment—and the Reign of Terror proved that rights unbased in God produce an authority which is brute force."—*Baring-Gould's Christianity*, p. 88.

† "Many a hundred sermons have I heard in England; many a dissertation on the mysteries of faith, on the Divine mission of the clergy, on apostolic succession, on bishops and justification, and the theory

life comes within the province of the preacher, and perish the theology which will not let me lift my voice against the man who gambles with that which is the staff of life, or deals lightly with wedded love.

Religion cannot be separated from doctrine. The antithesis between theology and religion is even more common than that between theology and morals. But religion must terminate on God. And the character of a man's religion will be determined, therefore, by that of his theology. He may not allow an objective revelation to influence his religious feelings, but his feelings, nevertheless, have relation to a subjective theology. For a man to fall back on religion, in order that he may justify his denial of Scripture doctrine, is only a convenient way of evading the question whether the doctrine of Scripture is true. If it is true, it is perilous to have a religion which is not based on it. A Christian may distinguish between theology and religion, by saying that a knowledge of doctrine may exist without experimental religion, which of course is true. But the Christian whose experience is the deepest would be the last to disparage doctrine in order to help his piety.

The marrow of Christianity is a doctrine—"Jesus Christ and Him crucified." This makes Christianity precious. To omit this is to rob the religion of Jesus of its value. To keep it in the background is to betray the Son of Man with a kiss.

#### *Inconsiderate Zeal for Scripture Phraseology.*

But suppose that a man approves of all we say in regard to doctrine, may he not ask, with reason, Why have men not adhered

of good works and verbal inspiration, and the efficacy of the sacraments; but never, during these thirty wonderful years, never one, that I can recollect, on common honesty, on those primitive commandments, 'Thou shalt not lie,' and 'Thou shalt not steal.'"—*Short Studies on Great Subjects, 2nd Series*, p. 333.

to scriptural phraseology? Why have they gone out of their way to invent formulas?

Our reply is, that without formulas we can neither express doctrine nor protest against error.

Let us take, for example, the doctrine of the Person of Christ. The devout mind must desire to have all the knowledge that is possible concerning this great mystery. We know that He is God, though not from any one proof text; that He was man; with a human body and a human soul; that the two natures were distinct and entire—humanity was not deified and divinity was not dormant; that there were not two egos, two centres of consciousness, but one person.

Suppose, now, we wish to express these separate truths in a single statement, how is it to be done? We cannot find a passage in Scripture which will suit us. If we adhere to Scripture phraseology, we must be satisfied with a partial statement, or we must carry in our memory the collated proof texts. The latter is out of the question, and the former would teach error, since a part would be taken for the whole.

Now, is it not a fact that in studying Scripture in reference to any truth, we make up our minds as to the meaning of the combined teachings of Scripture, and that we carry what serves as an equivalent in our memory? If asked to give our opinion on any doctrine, would we not do it in our own words, without being careful to cite Scripture *verbatim*? If, as a matter of fact, in spite of ourselves, we do use formulas, is there any harm in writing down these formulas in black and white, and, instead of expressing them loosely, aiming at an exact equivalent for Scripture?

Then what better can we do than fall in with the formula of our catechism: "The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and con-

tinueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures and one person for ever."

But the Church has been driven to formulated expressions of faith as safeguards against error. If a man says he believes that Paul was inspired, and adds, so was Shakespeare, it will be necessary for Christians to find out the exact sphere of the word inspiration as used in the Scripture, and to define it. Hence, when men in the early centuries could call Christ divine, and yet regard Him as a creature, the Nicene Fathers formulated the doctrine of the deity of Christ in an unequivocal symbol. And the fact that Christianity is identified with the doctrine of the deity of Christ justifies the Nicene Creed. It stands in our literature to-day, not as the monument of an orthodox triumph, but as a barrier against the intrusion of error. And with something of the feeling which a Hollander would entertain toward the man who should break the dykes and let in the waters of the German Ocean, should I regard the proposition to abolish creeds and expose the Church to the tides of scepticism.

*False inferences from the imperfection of our knowledge and the limitation of our faculties.*

Men look on creeds very much in the light of theological strait-jackets, and to fetter doctrine with formula is regarded by them as an act of injustice and impertinence. Human language, they assure us, is not adequate to express the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is presumption which merits unqualified rebuke to suppose that man-made formulas can exhaust the mysterious doctrine of the Incarnation.

The objection is not so grave as it is high-sounding. For what is there in it which will not apply as well to the Scriptures as to the formulas which are the equivalents of Scripture? The objection based on the limits of religious thought does not press

with more weight on formulated truth than on Scripture itself. But do we allow it to prevent our acceptance of the Scripture? Do we discard the knowledge which the Scripture affords because the knowledge is limited? Is our knowledge indistinct because it is partial? Must our vision be blurred because only a small portion of space falls within our horizon? Do we worship an unknown God because we know Him only in part? Do we fall back in indolent scepticism because thought is paralysed in the attempt to mount upward from the sphere of the revealed into the sphere of the unknown? There would be force in the objection, if the formula claimed to be an exhaustive expression of all the truth concerning the doctrine which it embodies, and if the materials for it were furnished by the mind. But it claims only to be an exhaustive expression of revealed truth, which alters the case. And, if we are compelled, as we have seen, to resort to formula to express doctrine, and, since we do not understand what we cannot express, to deny the right to formulate is to deny the right to understand.

Let us look at the question in reference to a specific doctrine. Are we to believe that what the Scriptures say of Christ is true? Yes. Is there any presumption in predicating of Christ, without addition or subtraction, what the Scriptures say respecting Him? None. What becomes of the objection to formula, then, provided the formula fulfils the condition of being an adequate expression of the Scripture's teaching? I grant that it is legitimate to ask whether we can express the teaching of Scripture; but this, as already hinted, is equivalent to asking whether we can understand the Scripture. The formulas, when expressed, will present difficulties. The union of two wills in one Person is an insoluble difficulty; but it is inherent in the doctrine, and not the result of the formula. The fidelity of the formula is seen in the

absence of an attempt to remove the difficulty by tampering with the facts.

And that these dogmas are metaphysical is not a grave objection. It is as impossible to eliminate metaphysics from theology as it is to boil water without heating it. When a man enters on the study of a theanthropic Person, he is, of necessity, dealing at once with psychology and metaphysics. It is the theme, and not the handling of it, which accounts for the metaphysical element. It is as difficult for those who ridicule metaphysics as it is for theologians to run from their metaphysical shadow. "God," says the *Shorter Catechism*, "is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." "God," says Matthew Arnold, "is a stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being. . . . God is an enduring power (not ourselves) which makes for righteousness." I leave my hearers to judge whether the definition given by the apostle of culture is less metaphysical or less obscure than that given by the Westminster Divines.

2. *Theology as systematic.*—Men who will tolerate the Apostles' Creed find no words in which to express their contempt for systematic theology. And I will frankly concede that between a full system and no system at all there is no logical landing-place. To affirm the necessity of systematic theology, and at the same time deplore its excess, strikes us as exceedingly weak. It is hard to have an excess of truth, and a system which is not true we can afford to dispense with altogether.

I have time only to indicate some of the leading objections to system in theology, and to present some counter arguments in its defence. Systematists wrest the Scriptures, we are told. Under the euphemism of interpreting Scripture in accordance with the analogy of faith, they read into proof text meanings which they were never meant

to bear. This is sometimes the case, and the men who do it are to blame, not systematic theology. Office-holders line their pockets with public gold, but office-holding is not to blame.

It is said, again, that systematic theology is impossible. But since systems meet us on every hand, the expression must be loosely used. If it means that systems may be more or less correct, the statement is proper. If it means that the most unexceptionable system is not free from difficulties, it is equally true. Calvinism brings into coordinate relations doctrines which apparently conflict, but which are certainly true. But for the systematic expression of them, we should not know so well the difficulties which beset them, and the method by which we know our ignorance is not to be despised. To know that we do not know is by no means an unimportant item of information. But physical science, too, has its staggering facts and labours under the disadvantage of incompleteness. Systems of theology are not useless because they are not exhaustive of the questions with which they deal. But, continues the objector, the Bible is not a system. Nor does the book of nature proceed on principles of classification. The forests are not Kew Gardens; fishes do not swim under the direction of Agassiz; nor do the waves roll the sea-shells on the beach with the care of a cabinet collector. Do we object, on this account, to the sciences of ichthyology and botany? Then why object to systematic theology, when the student of the Bible does exactly in his department what the student of nature does in his?

We are told again that it is not safe to employ logic as an instrument in theological investigation. Pressed by argument, and feeling the perplexities of their position, it is common for men to put a stop to controversy by denouncing logic. "Logically," they say, "your conclusion follows, but"—they do not abide by the conclusion. In

depreciating logic they are in the company of able men of opposite schools—Isaac Taylor and John Henry Newman. But to quarrel with logic is to quarrel with one's eyes. For logic is the law of inference, and we must use it, or part company with most of our knowledge. Intuition will not take us far in theology, and if you say that testimony will suffice, the testimony relied on is the testimony of Scripture, which is of unquestionable value, because the Bible is the word of God. But that it is the word of God we know by inference. The inspiration of the Scripture being an inferential doctrine, we cannot get rid of logic by the device of appealing to Scripture.

The *deductive* method in theology is today an object of special reprobation. And we concede that it is fair that specific scriptural evidence shall be required for the separate doctrines of our faith, and that neither blind devotion to the Fathers nor *a priori* reasoning shall take the place of direct appeal to the Bible. We differ with the high-churchman who is satisfied with a *catena* of ante-Nicene quotations, and we differ likewise with Mr. Morell, who tells us that "the advancement of theology does not depend so much upon any logical or purely inductive processes, applied to scriptural data, as upon the clearing of our religious intuitions, and the higher development of the whole religious consciousness." The way to reach a safe conclusion respecting any scriptural theme is to undertake an inductive examination of the Scriptures. Theology, in this sense, is an inductive science, and theologians employ the inductive method.\* It is idle, however, to say that

\* "In professing to follow the method of induction, I use the phrase, as Bacon did, in a large sense, as standing for that whole mode of procedure which begins with the observation of facts, and makes its final appeal to facts, as establishing the law. But in this process there may be a deductive element; as, when we suppose that the law is so-and-so, that is, devise an hypothesis, and inquire what consequences

deduction has no legitimate place in theology. "The truths of Scripture," says Canon Liddon,\* "are not so many separate, unfruitful, unsuggestive dogmas," and the theologian has as good right to argue from one doctrine the truth of another, as Leverrier had to infer from the perturbations of Uranus the existence of an unknown planet. Leverrier's prediction was fulfilled in the discovery of Neptune, and theological inferences, we allow, need the verification of scriptural proof.

"A living faith is pretty certain to draw inferences,"† and so we argue, with reason, that since sin makes men helpless, new life must result from the efficiency of Divine grace; and Scripture verifies the inference. And further, that if the sphere of efficacious grace is determined by Divine sovereignty, the salvation of God's people is due to electing love. We have thus, for the separate doctrines of Scripture, the double argument of inference and direct scriptural statement. This, however, is to understate the evidential value of deductive theology. For, if it is found that the doctrines which the Bible holds in solution, when precipitated, crystallise in uniform relations, we instinctively ask: Is there no design in this? Do not the teachings of these different books fall into organic shape because the books themselves were written for the unfolding of a Divine plan? When I take the pieces of a dissected map and find that they will fit in a certain order and in no other, and that thus arranged the outline of the map is properly presented, I am convinced, beyond question, that they were made for each other, and that I have arranged them correctly.

would follow, always with the design of trying these results by facts, and adopting the alleged law only when it can stand the test."—*McCosh on the Intuitions*, p. 3 (Note).

\* *Bampton Lectures on the Divinity of Christ*, p. 441.

† Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 442.

And so, when I find that the doctrines of the Bible answer to each other, so that if one is true, another must follow, and from the edge of one the shape of the contiguous doctrine can be predicted, and when, moreover, I discover that the separate doctrines, arranged side by side, reveal an outline of theology definite and congruous, I become stronger in my belief in all the doctrines, from the congruity of the system which they disclose, and confirmed in my belief of any single doctrine by its correlation with the rest.

A criterion is in this way furnished for testing a theological opinion, which challenges examination. When the "moral influence" theory is presented as an adequate account of the Atonement, it must run the gauntlet of doctrinal comparison; and because it is not in keeping with the doctrine of sin, of the Deity of Christ, or of regeneration, it must be rejected. For, to receive it would be to reduce system to chaos, and to necessitate the denial of every distinctive doctrine of our faith.

And who will affirm that, in these days, when error is rife, a comprehensive knowledge of Christian theology is of slight importance to the minister of Christ? By theological knowledge, however, is not meant a mere text-book acquaintance with the leading articles of our faith, but a knowledge so intimate and penetrating that the student shall see at a glance the bearing of one doctrine upon another, and, by a process shorter than formal syllogism, shall perceive the logical consequences of a heretical opinion.

But it is absurd to complain of system in theology, for theological truths are so related, that if we know a man's place in respect to one doctrine, it will not be difficult to predict his position with reference to others. Let anthropology be the starting point, and as a man judges of sin will he be constrained to judge of the Atonement.

Let soteriology be the point of departure, and a man's views in regard to the death of Christ will be reflected in his ideas respecting sin. This is only saying that, whether a man wishes or not, he must be systematic. It is impossible for a man to continue long in possession of incompatible elements of faith. When he parts company with a doctrine, he soon loses faith in its correlatives. And the study of those writers who affect independence of system will prove that their views are marked by coherency and logical sequence. The abusers of system are systematic in their abuse.

#### IV. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS PROGRESSIVE.

An article in a late number of the *Contemporary Review*\* opens with the following sentence: "It is universally admitted among reflecting men that in proportion to the growth of a cultivated reason, the dogmatic standards of past ages become less and less adequate as exhaustive charts of human belief." To deny one a place "among reflecting men," on account of his theological conservatism, is, to say the least, arbitrary. The sentence is quoted, however, not for review, but as the indication of a prevailing sentiment from which we dissent. There would be no wisdom, certainly, in making our Confession of Faith the basis of theological instruction if we were ready to regard it as antiquated and unsuited to the present age; and the man who is expected to promise that he will teach nothing directly or indirectly which is contrary thereto should think twice before he consents to be fettered by a "creed outworn." It may surprise some that a man will agree to abide faithfully by a stereotyped expression of doctrine, affirming thereby that progress is a thing of which he is not sanguine, and which, indeed, he does not crave. The subject, therefore, has special relevancy in my address to-night.

\* Ethics of Creed Subscription.—*Contemporary Review* for August, 1872.

If truth is not valuable for its own sake, it is not difficult to see why men should dislike a theology which offers no inducement for its study in the prospect of new discovery. And some men seem to think that there is in the simple idea of progress an advantage which would be missed were the sum total of theological knowledge already in possession. The imperfect condition of science, and the hope of contributing to the advancement of a particular branch of it, have a great deal to do, we are aware, with scientific enthusiasm. If all that ever can be known of chemistry could be put in a book to-day, the students of that science would begin to labour in more prolific fields. Should scientific progress stop, scientific ardour would rapidly cool. It is a mistake, however, to value theological science only for the intellectual gratification which its study affords. Theology is the systematic expression of revealed truth. It is valuable only in the ratio that a man has confidence in it. If our interest in theology terminates on the truth, and not on our study of the truth, there can be no doubt that to know all that can be known is better than to be looking for fresh gains. Whether there is room for progress in theology is the question which we are to discuss. What has been said is enough to show that the man who is expectant of no great advance in theological opinion is not necessarily to be commiserated.

The progress concerning which inquiry is to be instituted, is progress in theology, let it be understood. It will not prove a progress in theology to remind us that times have changed since Calvin burnt Servetus, and reformers refused to shake hands because they differed on the subject of sacramental grace. The growing harmony among Christians, and the disposition to treat each other in a more fraternal spirit, is evidence of the growth of toleration, but is not due to a convergence of doctrinal views. It is creditable to Protestantism that "a man may

speak his mind without having his ears cropped," but to cite a fact, as illustrating progress in theology, would betray ignorance of the question under discussion. And the mistake would be as great if the denial of progress in theology were treated as the equivalent of that unreasonable conservatism which adheres to the old, because it is old, and which makes "use and wont" a sufficient reason for resisting a needed change. There are men in our own church who believe that our standards contain the system of truth taught in the Word of God, who nevertheless are far from believing that in the details of work and worship there is no room for improvement. If there be any progress in theology, it must be objective or subjective, it must refer to the receiving of new truth, or the better understanding of truth already in possession.

#### *Objective Progress.*

The Protestant position is, that the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice. Progress, so far as it has reference to the receiving of religious truth on other authority than that of Scripture, is anti-Protestant. It implies that the Bible is insufficient or incorrect, and is allied with Romanism, Mysticism, or Rationalism.

The Roman and the Anglo Catholic agree in denying the sufficiency of Scripture, and in affirming, in opposition to Protestantism, the right of tradition to add to the teachings of the Bible; with the difference, however, that the latter, by limiting the orbit of tradition to the first five centuries, saves himself from some of the difficulties which the former encounters in the attempt to prove a "general consent" in behalf of the Tridentine theology. But the Romanist is able to guarantee the traditions to which he makes his appeal by citing the infallibility of the Church; an argument, indeed, which loses some of its cogency from the fact that the infallibility of the Church is invariably certified by a

similar appeal to tradition. It was with the view, perhaps, of escaping from this vicious circle that Dr. Newman advocated the doctrine of development as sufficing to account for the extra-scriptural dogmas of Romanism, without the necessity of finding support for them in an unbroken tradition. If the Church is infallible, however, there is no need of the theory; and if the Church is not infallible, by what right does Dr. Newman claim authority for the developments in the religious consciousness of Romanism, which he would deny to other developments in the religious consciousness of Protestantism? This doctrine sets up a subjective standard of truth, and is simply Rationalism, doing service for the Pope. It was necessary for Romanism that the Church should speak in the present and not in the past tense—should have power to proclaim new dogmas without the necessity of quoting patristic authority in support of them. And the Vatican Council has made possible an indefinite progress in theology by affirming the infallibility of the Pope.

Mysticism is in accord with Romanism in so far as it affirms the insufficiency of the Scriptures, and the possibility, therefore, of acquiring theological knowledge outside of them. It is different from Rationalism too, in that the avowed authority on which this extra-scriptural knowledge is received, instead of being reason, is the Spirit of God. The faith of the Romanist terminates on what he believes the Holy Ghost has revealed to the Church; that of the Mystic on what he believes the Holy Ghost reveals to himself. Mysticism has affinities with Rationalism, however, in so far as it admits only a subjective standard of truth. Confident that he is the recipient of special revelation, the Mystic may adhere to wrong interpretations of Scripture, or may entertain theological opinions which are not found in Scripture. In fact, the opposite views of different men may each be supported by appeal to the same inspired

authority. The system leads to an assertion of personal infallibility, and (by the denial of an objective standard of faith) to the confounding of truth and error. It is found in many forms, in connection sometimes with deep piety, and at others with open infidelity.

The Rationalist believes in progress too, for he sets up a subjective standard of truth, and instead of believing in an infallible Pope, believes in his infallible self. There are wide differences, of course, among those who have adopted a rationalizing method in theology. There are systems which preserve the nomenclature of the Church, but depart widely from the doctrines of the Church, if they do not deny them entirely. And there are others which in the main adhere to the doctrines of the Bible, with an infusion, however, of rationalistic thought. But whether men proceed by way of speculative independence of Scripture, or by a critical repudiation of it, the principle which guides them is the same, and it is neither more nor less than a denial of the supreme authority of the Bible. Between those who have modified the Scripture doctrine of the person of Christ by the influence of speculation, and those who affirm the mythical theory of Strauss, there is all the difference between Christianity and infidelity. But the principle which justifies the speculative modification is akin, nevertheless, to that which has resulted in the discredit of the gospel history. If the speculative method supersede the inductive method in theology, there will be, of course, no limit to progress, and, let us add, no test of truth.

It will appear, then, that the points at issue, so far as objective progress is concerned, are the sufficiency and the inspiration of Scripture. If it is proper for men to speak flippantly of Paul's opinions—if it is right for them to say that Paul reasoned incorrectly, that he has presented a wrong view of doctrine, that his utterances respecting the sacrifice of Christ were coloured by Jewish

prejudices—of course there is room for progress in theology, and it is difficult to see where progress will stop. But to take this ground would be to deny the authority of Scripture, and throw the whole area of theology open to fruitless speculation.

### *Subjective Progress.*

Assuming, then, the sufficiency of Scripture and its inspiration, we shall agree that, whatever progress there may be, it does not mean the inculcation of doctrines which are either extra-scriptural or unscriptural. It has reference only to a better understanding of the Scripture. And this may be due either to a more correct text or to a better grammatical knowledge. It is safe to say that we have not much to look for from the first source. Neither Codex Sinaiticus, nor Codex Vaticanus, is likely to affect a single doctrinal conclusion. What may be looked for from the other source is the sole question on the subject of progressive theology.

If the question were asked, whether there is room for Christians to make progress in the apprehension of the doctrinal teachings of the Bible, the answer would of course be in the affirmative. For, what are sectarian differences but advertisements of sectarian ignorance? It does not follow from this, however, that a man is ready to believe that *his* creed stands in need of revision. And it is only so far as the personal application of this question is concerned, that there is any room for discussion. Instead of asking a Calvinist whether he believes in progress in theology, let us ask him whether he regards the Westminster Confession of Faith as a true exhibition of the system of doctrine taught in the word of God. Supposing that the area of the confession is co-extensive with the doctrinal area of Scripture, for him to affirm that the Confession of Faith is true, is, by implication, to deny that he believes in progress. For progress would involve a modification of the Confession.

If a man believes that the standards of our Church teach the true doctrine of the Person of Christ, he will not believe in progress so far as Christology is concerned. And certitude concerning all the doctrines of the Confession, would be equivalent to the denial of a belief in progress. Belief in progress in theology would imply that he had some doubts respecting one or more of the doctrinal utterances of the Confession. And his belief in progress would be measured by his incertitude.

It is plain, then, that to say that a man believes in progress in theology is to use very vague language. For his belief in progress may cover the entire system of theology, or it may have reference only to a single, and that a comparatively unimportant, doctrine. It may refer to an important change of opinion, or it may have reference only to a more exact and discriminating expression of a dogma. And, since belief in progress is just the measure of a man's incertitude respecting the teachings of the Confession, and may admit of indefinite degrees, it would be wrong to impute to a man revolutionary sentiments on the whole subject of theology, merely because he avowed a belief in progressive theology.

It would appear further, that if one is disposed to dispute the position which I assume, in affirming my belief in the Confession of Faith, the proper course for him to follow is to indicate the weak points in the Confession, and to say where progress may be looked for, and in what respects it is open to improvement. On *a priori* grounds no one has the right to affirm that the Confession of Faith is not true. And if it is true, we repeat it, there is no room for a progress which will necessitate a re-statement of its doctrines. For one to affirm that there is room for progress in theology, he should be ready to say what doctrines he doubts or disbelieves. This would remove the discussion at once into the sphere of

theological controversy, and would take away from the idea of progressive theology what constitutes, in our judgment, its most objectionable feature. For it is not surprising that a man, either through constitutional bias or because he has given some subjects less examination than they deserve, feels in doubt regarding some of the doctrines taught in our Confession of Faith, while entertaining no doubt respecting others. How many intelligent laymen there are in our body who would candidly say that they experience difficulty in receiving some of the doctrines, that of predestination, for example. This incertitude implies that there is room for them to make progress in the apprehension of doctrine; and it may go so far as to leave the impression on their mind that the Church itself has not yet reached an exhaustive statement on these subjects. In fact, it is hard to see how they can avoid the feeling that the symbols of the Church need modification to the extent, that is to say, of the doctrines about which they stand in doubt.

The matter of subjective progress, it appears, is neither more nor less than the personal one, regarding the extent to which we can give assent to the Confession of Faith. It is one of those subjects to which Dr. Newman's aphorism, "Egotism is true modesty," is applicable. It is accordingly proper for me to affirm my belief that the Confession of Faith is a true exhibition of the system of doctrine taught in the Bible, and that it is so far complete that no material modification of it is needed. In affirming this I deny progressive theology. To justify my denial would be to justify my affirmation — would be to show why I believe the separate doctrines of the Confession; or, in other words, to write a system of theology. This I shall not be expected to do. Nor shall I be asked to anticipate the doubts which others may have in regard to particu-

lar doctrines, and endeavour to show that they are not well founded.

That to which I take exception in the argument of progressive theologians is the assumption that our present creeds are necessarily inadequate.

The avowal of progressive theology on *a priori* grounds is open to objection. In the first place, because it is arbitrary and high-handed for men to assert that doctrines for which ample evidence is presented are untrue, without being at the pains to examine the evidence. This mode of proceeding stultifies all reasoning, and destroys the value of testimony. It is open to objection, moreover, because it is a mode of reasoning which, if allowed in the case of one doctrine, should by rights be allowed in reference to every doctrine, and which tends, therefore, to reduce us to a state of utter scepticism.

These reasons will be presented more fully in connection with a review of the leading arguments in favour of progressive theology.

It is said that the Confessions of one age are not suited to the wants of a succeeding age. But men who employ this language forget that a creed is not like a coat, made to fit the wearer and accommodate his taste. The question is whether the creed ever was the equivalent of Scripture. If it was when it was made, it is not less so to-day. For the idea of a creed is not that it shall represent human opinions respecting a doctrine, but that it shall reflect the teaching of the Bible. The question is not whether a creed suits men, but whether it is true to the Scripture. If it was a thousand years ago, it is not less so now. For, unlike the fashion of this world, which passeth away, truth is immutable and immortal. If the principle were allowed, which the writer in the *Contemporary Review* has stated, to wit, "that it is impossible for any creed to continue adequate from age to age," it would follow that we never could say *credo* to any formulated system of doctrine. It would be

impossible to believe that to be true which at the same time we believed to be liable to indefinite modification. A *creed*, in the strict sense of the word, would be out of the question. We should have but little encouragement to proceed with the work of improving our Confession; there would be no hope of reaching a final opinion, and we should have the melancholy satisfaction of knowing that Christians, a century hence, will find the creeds of to-day as antiquated as some now regard those which they wish to reconstruct. For the principle which underlies the reasoning of progressive theologians is that, of necessity, creeds are only tentative. This argument is used sometimes by men who would be very unwilling to carry it to its logical results. But, if it is not reasonable to suppose that a set of men in the seventeenth century could make a creed which will meet the wants of the nineteenth century, by parity of reasoning, may we not argue that it is not likely that a set of men in the third century would succeed any better? Let us affirm our expectation of progress in theology, not on the ground of any doubt respecting a particular doctrine, or for the reason that we suppose that the Scripture lends it little or no support, but on the general principle that the creeds of the past are unsuited to the wants of the present. Then what is to prevent us from supposing that it may turn out that men have been mistaken in believing Jesus to be God; that, in fact, they have been worshipping the creature rather than the Creator? Is it possible for us to entertain a doubt respecting this doctrine, and at the same time rely on Jesus as our Saviour? We should think not, since the idea would involve the palpable contradiction of believing at the same time that He is God, and yet that He may not be God. If I affirm the sentiment quoted a little ago, my belief becomes a provisional belief, my Saviour a provisional Saviour, and my confidence a provisional

confidence, which at any moment may be destroyed.

We are reminded, in defence of progressive theology, that there has been progress in other departments; that the physical sciences do not claim to be complete; and we are asked why theology should claim to be an exception. Yes, we shall be told that even the Church at last has grown liberal enough to accept the facts of astronomy, that the doctrine which nearly cost Galileo his life is a schoolroom common-place; that what it was then infidelity to affirm, it is now insanity to deny. But the advance in physical science is due to constant increase of scientific materials. Old theories are proved false in the presence of new facts, and new theories are only tentative because based on a partial survey of facts. But we are not dealing with a science in which a text-book becomes worthless before it is worn out, and new facts are forcing men to a re-consideration of their theories. With all the facts of the science in so small a compass, it ought not to be regarded as antecedently improbable, that by this time some have reached definite and accurate conclusions respecting them. Still, you will admit, continues the objector, that the Church has made progress in the apprehension of doctrine. Why, then, do you suppose that progress has been arrested; why may there not be room for progress now, as there was when the Reformed Confessions were made? The Nicene age marks one advance; Augustine another; the Reformation constitutes an epoch, and the Reformed Confessions are monuments of theological progress. Why are we to conclude that theology has come to a standstill? We answer: If it be conceded that the Reformed Confessions mark an advance in theological knowledge, it must be admitted that they have lessened the area of ill-understood doctrine, and it is possible that they so thoroughly discuss the subjects with which they deal as to leave no room for a new line

of thought which does not contradict the positions taken by the reformed theologians.

If any theological topics have been left unhandled, of course they may be regarded as furnishing a fine field for theological investigations. But these topics are certainly very few. And if progress in any great degree is to be expected, it must be by upsetting the conclusions already reached. Is there any antecedent probability that we who have no more facts, and no better brains than the Reformers had, are likely to reach more trustworthy conclusions? This is a sufficient reply to those who think that because there has been progress in the past, there must continue to be progress in the future, though it is not the argument by which we maintain the position we have taken. We do not believe the confession, because of an antecedent unlikelihood that the Reformers were wrong. On the contrary, our great respect for them is the result of our conviction that the Confessions they framed are so complete, and so conformable to the Scripture.

But, in face of the wide differences which separate Protestant denominations, is it not bigotry and narrow-mindedness to affirm that Calvinism has reached ultimate conclusions in the interpretation of Scripture? Is it not, in a word, arrogating infallibility, to affirm that a single type of theological opinion represents the true doctrine of Scripture? With some minds, questions like these would have a great deal of force. And though it may seem arrogant, at first sight, to take the position which we do, yet, on closer study of the question, it will not be so regarded. That twelve clocks, my own among them, indicate, at the same moment, a different hour of the day, does not prove that they are all wrong, though they all may be wrong. And the system of Calvinism is not proved to be wrong in the simple fact that it is surrounded by opposing systems. Whether it is right or wrong, depends on

the evidence by which it is supported. If there were no evidence for it, it would not be worthy of belief, even though no competing systems were in the field. And if it is attested, the presence of other systems cannot justly prevent me from giving my assent to it. I surely have the right, without being charged with bigotry, to say whether I believe that the system of our Confession is taught in the Bible. And believing, by force of testimony, that it is taught there, surely I shall not be asked, even for the sake of peace, and to avoid the imputation of narrowness, to contradict myself to the extent of saying that I believe that the Confession is false, when the whole tenour of Scripture teaches me that it is true.

But may not the differences which divide Protestantism find their solution in a higher and as yet unrevealed unity? This again, begs the very question in dispute. I cannot believe this if I believe the Confession of Faith to be a true representation of the Scripture. And this, as already remarked, cannot be determined on *a priori* ground. If Calvinism is true, Arminianism is false. If the Baptists are right, Paedobaptists are wrong. The positions represented by these names being contradictory, we are shut up to one or the other of them.

We do not look for a full agreement in doctrine among Christians. But, believing in Calvinism, we believe that if Christendom shall ever have a unanimous faith, it will be a Calvinistic faith, which was the faith of Augustine, which was the faith of Paul. And it is worthy of notice that men who have no special leaning towards our doctrinal system do not hesitate to avow that it is found in the Bible. "If Arminianism most commends itself to our feelings," says Mr. Froude, "Calvinism is nearer to the facts." And Matthew Arnold, though he has no respect for Paul's theology, admits that Calvinism is wrapped up in his "harsh and

unifying image of the clay and the potter."

In discussing the question of subjective progress in theology, we have been led to affirm belief in the Calvinistic system—the question, as I have repeatedly said, being purely a personal one, and the denial of progress implying a belief in a particular system of doctrine as truly representative of the word of God. But the Calvinist is not the only one interested in the denial of a progress in theology which finds its support in *a priori* considerations respecting the adequateness of ancient creeds; for these considerations, as we have seen, jeopardise even the doctrine of the Deity of Christ.

#### V. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS SYMBOLICAL.

It is a matter of great importance to the private Christian to have definite opinions respecting the teachings of God's word. And were there no visible organisation called the Church; were Christianity to resolve itself into out-and-out Individualism, systematic theology would continue to be a subject of great value to the diligent student of the Bible.

Theology is the basis of organic unity in Christendom. The divisions of Christendom have been justified on theological grounds. Theological differences separated the Eastern and Western Churches; they gave rise to the Reformation, and they subsequently divided Protestants. The separate denominations are held together by their theological agreements. In some instances the theology is expressed in a written form or symbol, in others, as in Romanism and Anglicanism, in a living organisation. The unity of the Papacy expresses itself in the dogma *ubi Petrus ibi ecclesia*; the unity of Anglicanism in the sentiment that the Church is a community of Christians "episcopally officered."

Theology must enter into the conditions of Church union, whether the union be more or less extensive. And it cannot but be a

matter of regret that Christians have so far differed in their interpretations of the Bible as to justify so many independent organizations. Nor does it remove the occasion of this regret to be reminded of the good effects which grow out of generous sectarian emulation, or to be told that denominationalism is a wise anticipation of the wants of different types of mind. For the divisions are the result of difference of theological opinion, and show plainly that some at all events are greatly in the wrong, since if all were in the right there would be no disagreement. It is not the organic division which we regret so much, as it is the doctrinal disagreement of which it is the exponent. If other elements did not enter into the discussion we could readily affirm that Catholicity is preferable to Sectarianism, and that the Church should bend its energies in the direction of a restored unity. The other elements which enter into the case make the subject one of difficulty. That the question is exciting attention one can see by watching the religious periodicals. Dr. Pusey and Dean Stanley, the poles apart on most theological questions, are both anxious for the reunion of Christendom, the former on the narrow basis of apostolic succession, and the latter on the broad principle of comprehension. And the positions taken by the two men may fairly represent the only reasonable modes of advocating a reunion of Christendom: a man must, in other words, hope for it on the ground that all Christians will come round to his way of thinking, or that they will agree to tolerate very wide theological differences. There are few who look for reunion on the basis of unanimity. The "Old Catholic" movement is not likely to solve the sectarian problem. And it is to comprehension we must look, if anywhere, for the consummation which by many is devoutly wished for. The denominational difficulty grows out of the attempt to unite

the two ideas of organic unity and doctrinal completeness. If organic unity were the only essential, wide divergences of belief could be tolerated. If organic life were not important, Christianity might run into individualism. When the break with Rome occurred the doctrine was *ipso facto* announced that organic unity was not essential. It is not strange that Protestantism became sectarian. For if men might protest against Rome and make two denominations, why might not Protestants protest against each other and make ten. If we protest against Rome for teaching too much, we shall naturally separate from Unitarians who teach too little.

Since organic unity is not essential, any proposition to unite the sects on a basis of comprehension must answer the question whether the change will be attended with a gain greater than the loss. For it is needless to say there is some advantage in the present state of things which broad-churchism would not possess.

The comprehension scheme requires, first of all, the giving up, on the part of Christians, of their ideas on Church polity. For as long as Prelacy, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism are conscientiously defended, on Scriptural grounds, Sectarianism will hold its own. The principle suggests a difficulty at the outset, of whose speedy removal we see no tokens. Then the principle of comprehension, in order to carry out the designs of those who advocate it, ought to admit to Christian fellowship all who are Christians. How are we to determine exactly who are Christians? What is the *minimum* of doctrine which will be considered necessary for Christian fellowship? At first sight, the movement would indicate a great advance in Christian charity. But, on closer examination, we shall find that this is not the case. For it is far less invidious to have a long creed which is not *intended* to include all Christians, than a short one,

which puts upon those who exclude men from Christian fellowship the responsibility of saying they are not Christians at all.

But, suppose that the principle of comprehension should go into effect, what would be the result? Organic action on the part of Christians at large would be out of the question. They might agree in observing the week of prayer; they might come to a better understanding respecting the distribution of missionary work; they might pour their united offerings into a common treasury. But they can do that now, and to a great extent are doing it. The work of the Church would necessarily be entrusted to local agencies; and the only difference, so far as polity is concerned, would be that the denominations would be separated by geographical boundaries, rather than by distinctions of creed. The Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church would die, and in their place we should have the Church of New York, the Church of Philadelphia, the Church of Chicago, etc. Suppose this denominational fusion should take place, what great gain, or what important difference would result? The Baptist would pass the church which believes in infant baptism, to wait on the ministry of one who believes that immersion is the only mode, and that believers are the only subjects of baptism. The Arminian would rather walk a mile than worship next door with a Calvinistic congregation. In a word, the principle of elective affinity would still control the relations of pastor and people, and we should be just where we were before

with the difference that we should have parted company with much that was dear and valued; we should miss the sympathy which exists between sharers of a common faith; we should lack the stimulus which is given to Christian enterprise by national denominationalism; we should foster indifference to doctrinal truth; and the world would lose the value of the separate lessons which the denominations teach. The world is in more need of Calvinism than of comprehension; and until we all come to the unity of the faith, Sectarism will be at once the reproach and the redemption of Protestant Christianity. "Looking around, then,"\* says Mr. Curteis, "what schemes are at the present moment presented to our choice, whereby the effort shall be made to organise Teutonic Christendom? Two only are in view, and they are these—(1) the scheme of 'the Evangelical Alliance,' and (2) the scheme of 'the old Catholic Church.'" Which is an Anglican's way of saying: We must agree, and so be one; or we must agree to differ, and so co-operate.

Let Christians learn, then, to soften the asperities of controversy—to recognise the brotherly relations subsisting among the sects—and then, in a spirit of preference which does not exalt itself into exclusiveness, and of emulation which does not run into rivalry, let them go side by side across prairies, and over mountains, and up rivers, and through cities, carrying the same glad message of redeeming love.

\* *Dissent in its Relation to the Church of England.* Bampton Lectures for 1871. Preface, p. 14.