

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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I.

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF DECREES.

THE proposal to revise the Westminster Standards has brought the doctrine of the Divine decrees into the foreground. The controversy turns upon this pivot. Other features come in incidentally, but this is capital and controlling. This is the stone of stumbling and rock of offense. If election and reprobation were not in the Confession and Catechism, probably the fifteen Presbyteries would not have overtured the Assembly. It is for this reason that we purpose to discuss the *Meaning and Value of the Doctrine of Decrees*, so plainly inculcated in the Scriptures, and from them introduced into the Westminster symbol. We are certain that the Biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners, and of His just liberty to determine how many He will save from their sin, and how many He will leave to their self-will in sin, is greatly misunderstood by many who profess the Presbyterian faith, and who sometimes describe it in much the same terms with the anti-Calvinist, and inveigh against it with something of the same bitterness. The conservative and the radical reviser meet together at this point, and while the former asserts that he has no intention to make any changes respecting the doctrine of decrees that in his opinion will essentially impair the integrity of the Calvinistic system, he nevertheless practically coöperates with the radical in bringing about a revolution in the sentiment and creed of the Presbyterian Church concerning one of the most distinctive articles of its belief. Because revision, be it conservative or radical, contends that there is more or less that is *un-Scriptural* in the tenets of election and reprobation as they are formulated in the Standards, and that

region. The earnest and powerful ministry of William Tennent, the founder of the Log College, and his sons, had prepared the way, and when Whitfield came, the revival spread through the churches with great power.

We cannot follow the interesting record of events. There is one chapter which will attract attention. It is entitled, "Was Log College the Germ of Princeton College?" Dr. Murphy does not claim that there was any direct connection, or that Log College was in any respect transferred to Princeton; but he shows that there was a very close indirect connection and that the one was, in an important sense, the germ of the other. His points in substance are, that the closing of one institution was coincident, in point of time, with the opening of the other; that the friends of the Log College took a most influential part in the founding of Princeton College; that the essential idea of both institutions was primarily the same, viz., the preparation of young men for the Gospel ministry. Dr. Stearns, in his history of the First Church, Newark, states, "The Log College was the germ of the College of New Jersey," and Whitfield speaks of the Neshaminy School as "having grown into a large college now erecting in the Jerseys."

The whole volume is one of exceeding interest and importance as connected with the founding of our Presbyterian Zion, and should be found in every Presbyterian household. Dr. Murphy lays the whole Church under a tribute of gratitude for his skillful and patient work; and the Presbyterian Board deserves great commendation for the handsome and tasteful volume which they have issued.

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III.—SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.

LEESBOEK OVER DE GEREFORMEERDE GELOOFSLEER. DOOR H. E. GRAVEMEIJER. Parts i-xx. Te Sneek: Wiarda, 1881-1889. (Some parts in a second edition.)

The revival of practical religion in Holland has been accompanied, especially during later years, by a revived interest in Reformed Theology. Though the Calvinistic doctrines had never entirely lost their hold upon that part of the people to whom religion was a reality, still they were not recognized in their historical significance. With a beautiful naïveté, the theological tenets of which religious experience attested the truth, were accepted and maintained as positive facts. But this phase has now passed and the time arrived when theology, only kept alive by the inward power of the truth, awakes to the full consciousness of its antecedents and its future calling. That the influence of the old Calvinism is here reasserting itself admits of no doubt. There is a historical continuity between the movement of the present day and the past. This very recognition of the intellectual factor is distinctive of Calvinism. It is characteristic of this historical tendency also, that it has manifested itself in a renewed study of the old systems of Reformed theology, a sort of theological renaissance. The thread of development is taken up where it broke off. A thorough review of the work which the fathers did constitutes the basis of what the men of to-day are striving for.

In this sense Gravemeijer's book is largely historical. It contains a lucid statement of the outlines of the Reformed system, without going into details to any great extent. That the work is rather voluminous (the twenty parts that have appeared up to date cover 2395 pages) is not owing so much to an

elaborate treatment of dogma itself and its underlying principles, as to the author's custom of introducing and establishing his views by careful exegetical discussion. While the doctrinal positions do not differ materially from the Reformed consensus, there is a decided improvement on the work of the old theologians in respect to exegesis. The author has not scorned to make use of the light which modern exegesis has shed on many points. Throughout he has handled this part of his task with great skill, and many a truth, which a superficial reader might pronounce foreign to Scripture, is strikingly brought out as the natural product of a progressive course of revelation.

Another commendable feature of this book is its practical character. The title calls it a "Reader," and with few exceptions the style and tone justify this name. If we did not know it, we might infer from the contents that the author has contracted his familiarity with Christian truth in pastoral life and not by secluded study. Everywhere he seizes upon those points by which doctrine stands related to experience. Passages of a hortatory, we might almost say homiletical, character are not wanting. The whole is such a happy combination of the theoretical and practical that its perusal becomes a pleasant task.

That this last trait would somewhat detract from the scientific value of the work was to be expected. Rigid systematizing and unifying of thought are not always compatible with that smoothness and perspicuity which are essential to a book, not in the first place destined for theologians, but for the general public. It would be unfair, therefore, to make this consideration weigh against a "Reader" with the same force with which it would weigh against a professed system of theology. Still it is our opinion that the author might have gone much further in giving prominence to certain unifying doctrines, without seriously impairing the popular character of his work. This is especially applicable to the doctrine of the covenants. Federalism with him is the pivot of the whole system, but nowhere a separate treatment of it is given. Its different elements lie scattered through various *loci*, and are, as it were, only incidentally referred to. First the concentration of Adam's own conduct into one act is considered under the head of "The Original State of Man," but nothing is said here in regard to Adam's representative character with reference to his posterity. Then, in the discussion of sin, first inherent original sin is dealt with, and only as an expedient in explaining this matter of fact, is our being represented by Adam postulated. The inference is certainly valid, but if once the federal idea be admitted, it can hardly be kept in such a subordinate position. There are sound reasons for asserting that federalism is not that late and accidental accretion to the body of Reformed theology, which at the present day it is often pronounced to be. The doctrine of justification by faith already contains its germ, and those who are in great haste to declare it antiquated, should reflect how far they shall be able afterwards to retain unmodified this great stronghold of Protestantism.

The doctrine of the Scriptures is given its legitimate place at the beginning. Plenary inspiration of the Bible is maintained. The author very strikingly remarks, that the modern view of a partial or relative inspiration is far more guilty of ignoring the organic unity of the Bible than the old theory. The old view may be beset with great historical difficulties, but it has immense advantages over all its modern substitutes from a speculative standpoint. It may be safely predicted that few of the latter will be able to stand the test of criticism as long and as well as the Church-view has done.

Gravemeijer's book is weakest on its speculative side. Both in questions belonging to Theology proper, and in those belonging to Anthropology and Soteriology, there is a want of depth and precision. That knowledge is con-

fined to a demonstration of things in so far as they are in time or space is a serious concession to a Gnosiology that is not ours. Some very lucid remarks are made about the interaction of conscience and the innate knowledge of God, but in another passage (Part i, 26), conscience is represented as bearing a direct testimony to God's existence, while on page 39 of the same part Kant's construction of the moral argument seems to be favored. Two speculative constructions of the Trinity are given, from the idea of God's self-knowledge, and from that of His love, which apart from their questionable value, are not in keeping with the sober character of the whole. That the world had a beginning in time is argued on the ground that otherwise God's infiniteness cannot be maintained, which reasoning clearly proceeds on the principle that the infinite must be the all. Time and space are repeatedly represented as exclusively subjective, and without any adverse comment Kant's views in regard to them are quoted, and, as it seems, adopted. By doing this the author has introduced into his Gnosiology an element of subjectivity which it would be impossible to confine to these two forms of representation. It would have been quite sufficient, for the purpose of establishing God's eternity and omnipresence, if the validity for God of time and space as *subjective* forms of consciousness had been denied. If time and space be something objective then they certainly are such for God, just as all human finiteness is, but it will not follow from this, that God's conscious life is governed immanently by these forms, as ours is. The distinction between the form and matter of sin is made use of to suggest an explanation of the problem, How God's providence stands related to sin? The distinction no doubt is valid, but the author errs when he introduces it as furnishing the mysterious thread of connection between the certainty in God's decree respecting evil and the realization of evil in the world. After subtracting from evil processes their physical or metaphysical substratum, that ethical thing which is sin, whatever we may call it, will still always remain, if not as a substance yet as a reality, and it is not given to us to explain how God's concursus can be either operative or inoperative with regard to this reality.

In Anthropology and Soteriology also there are many questions that need a fuller and more distinct treatment. From the outset the line between Adam's federal relation and his natural relation to God is not clearly drawn. In one place the remunerative side of God's justice is, in accordance with Kant's view, represented as the correlate of his vindictory justice, and an innate knowledge of both is ascribed to man (Part vii, 43). Later on, however, we are told that all reward is *ex pacto* (p. 44). It does not seem natural that man should possess an innate knowledge of what is of positive enactment. In regard to the covenant of grace we again miss a separate and thorough treatment. Everywhere, however, the federal principle is recognized. Christ's sinlessness, notwithstanding His birth from sinful humanity, is explained by His exemption from the covenant of works, and is based on the impersonality of His human nature. It would be interesting to institute a critical comparison between the theories of Realism and Federalism in regard to this single point. Dr. Shedd is compelled by his premises to postulate not only an antecedent sanctification, but also a proleptic justification of the human nature of Christ, in so far as, being *de facto* in Adam, it would be both guilty and polluted. This would seem to endanger the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us since it has been made use of already for His own justification. Gravemeijer, as a federalist, by denying the guilt of Christ's impersonal humanity, has no place for any such justification, and all that Christ does actively and passively remains available for the elect.

We have looked in vain for a clear definition of the Scriptural term *σάρξ*. The conception of death also might have been brought out in its importance.

Such psychological defects have evidently impaired the author's representation of the *ordo salutis* on its subjective side. Regeneration through faith is taught and the latter taken as the logical *prius* of the former. Conversion precedes both. It is not easy to see how conversion, or even that part of it which is called contrition, though it be rather a noetic than a voluntary act, can be possible without an undercurrent of harmony with the Divine law, *i. e.*, without a change of will. We may find the source of these statements in the proposition, that the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit proceeds from the understanding. If this be meant in the unqualified sense that no immediate influence is brought to bear upon the will, it certainly is an incorrect and dangerous position to hold. The ground why the author makes faith precede regeneration appears to be that, until we are actually united with Christ by faith, the saving power of His spirit cannot be subjectively applied to us—no new life can be infused. This again amounts to an implicit denial of the principle of pure imputation, which the author recognizes elsewhere. Of what value does the latter remain if God cannot give us life, unless an actual union has taken place? Moreover, this statement, when carried out to its legitimate consequences, would render every beginning of the subjective process of salvation impossible, for we might ask with equal right, how God could bestow upon a sinner the gift of conversion and faith, as long as he is outside of the mystical body of Christ. Against this confusion of the juridical and the mystical unions with Christ, we may refer to the statement of Weiss, "New Testament Theology," i, 460, 461, note 10.

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G. Vos.

THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL. A Manual of Christian Doctrine. By ARTHUR JAMES MASON, B.D., formerly Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. London: Rivingtons, 1888. Second edition, 1889. Pp. xxii, 483, small 8vo.

Mr. Mason's able exposition of doctrine is one of the very welcome signs of the revival of the study of dogmatic theology in the Church of England. Like Mr. Moule's equally able and much more satisfactory compend, it professes not to be "a book written for the learned," though even a "cultivated" audience may well find portions of it somewhat strong meat for unlearned stomachs. We cannot speak too highly of its earnest and reverent tone, of its lucid style, or of its truly profound analysis of doctrine. It shows the effect of careful and critical study of the New Testament; and bears traces of somewhat wide reading in the fathers and some modern dogmatic authors. Its type of doctrine is strongly Churchly, tinged with a speculative infusion, apparently derived chiefly from Martensen. To speak the truth frankly, Mr. Mason's Churchliness is so high as very unduly to affect his attitude towards truth. Thus, though his conception of Dogmatics is a high one—defining it as a Christian philosophy, not in the gnostic sense of "a human fabric borrowing elements from the Gospels," but in the sense that it is made up wholly by putting together the fragments of revealed truth given in exegesis—he adds, that this construction is to be made, not, as we might expect, with regard to the real relations of the separate dogmatic facts, but "in no arbitrary fashion, but in the way in which the Church has always grouped them." Accordingly, the preface ends with the declaration that he submits himself unreservedly to the correction of the Church for any errors he may have committed. All this sounds scarcely Protestant. And we cannot, therefore, be surprised to discern, as we read into the heart of the volume, that Mr. Mason's Protestantism is at times strongly conditioned by Romish leanings. This, of course, comes out especially in the doctrine of the sacraments.