

CHRISTIAN FAITH & LIFE

The Bible Student

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complete

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

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Editors:

WILLIAM M. MCPHEETERS, D. D.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D. D., LL. D.

SAMUEL M. SMITH, D. D.

GEORGE T. PURVES, D. D., LL. D.

DANIEL J. BRIMM, D. D.

JOHN D. DAVIS, D. D.



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Number 1.

Our common definitions of Theology are of the logical order, and begin by assigning it to its genus, viz.,

Science, and then seek its differentia, by which it is distinguished from other

sciences, in its subject matter. Theology, we say, is that science which treats of God in Himself and in His relations. This appears orderly and entirely satisfactory. It refers Theology to its class, and discriminates it from the other members of this class in the same way that each of them is discriminated from its fellows. It has not given universal satisfaction, however,—chiefly through an unwillingness, for one reason or another, to recognize Theology as a Science.

Sometimes this unwillingness is the result of nothing more than too low a conception of "Science." If, for example, we mean by "Science,"

the study of phenomena, merely,—then, to be sure, theology is "Science."

Too Low An Idea of "Science." not a "science," just as philosophy is not a "science," because, to wit, it is something immensely more. This is the

point of sight, for example, of Professor WILLIAM KNIGHT, who writes:

"It is outside the province of science to investigate the nature of substance. That is the province of philosophy; and when we raise the question of the ultimate essence of all things, it is a problem of philosophical theology. Theology is not a science. If theology were a science, God would be a phenomenon. There is a science of Religion, because the phenomenon of the human mind, in its effort to apprehend that which lies beyond Nature, can be classified and so far sustained: but there can be no Science of the Infinite. It is true that we might scientifically explain the results of any manifestation of the Infinite in Nature or in History; and, therefore, to that extent, we might have a Science of Theology; but we cannot place it within the circle of those sciences which have for their object-matter the phenomena of the universe" (Essay on "The Classification of the Sciences," in *Essays on Philosophy*, pp. 80, 81).

On the other hand, there is often apparent a low view of theology which denies to it, in principle, all scientific character,

Too Low a View of "Theology." and sets it, indeed, over against "Science" as its very antipodes. A specially gross form of this misconception may be found in Dr. ANDREW D. WHITE'S *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*, the very

truth of which sets aside without a word of justification all claim of theology to be itself a science. If Theology be itself a "Science," it is as absurd to talk of warfare between Science and Theology or of warfare between Science and Astronomy. The finding of the various sciences may, indeed, come into temporary apparent conflict; the Biologists and the Physicists are to-day at serious odds as to the age of the habitated earth—the Physicists (as represented by LORD KELVIN, for example,) refusing to allow the time demanded for the development of animal life ordained by the Biologists (as represented by HÆCKEL, for example). But neither party has assumed the exclusive name of "Science" for itself. Science with a big S being identified with its own special views. But it is just as absurd to talk of "Science having evidently conquered Dogmatic Theology," as Dr. White does, as to talk of "Science having evidently conquered Biology, or Physics."

More reasonably than in either of these cases, a difficulty is sometimes raised against recognizing theology as a science, on the ground that it is a practical discipline with its end outside itself. This is in accordance with a dictum which is thus laid down by PAUL DE LAGARDE:

"Everybody who knows Science knows that it has its end purely in itself, and seeks its own method accordingly, receiving presumptions, laws, points of view from no power in heaven or earth. What it wishes is to know, nothing but to know, and that only in order to know. It knows that it knows nothing, where it has proved nothing. It is to any man of science a matter of complete indifference what results from his investigations, if only one thing results from them,—that is, if only some new truth is discovered" (*Deutsche Schriften*, 1892, p. 37).

Therefore, the theologian, who is not indifferent to the outcome of

his work, but wishes to conduce to the eternal welfare of man, is no man of science; and theology, which has as its end not merely to make wise but "to make wise unto salvation," is no science. And conversely the theologian, were he a man of science, would and must be careless as to the outcome of his work; and theology, were it scientific, would have no concern with the practical value of the truths with which it deals.

Let men of science say whether Professor LAGARDE has declared the whole truth about them. Must, indeed, one cease to be a man, when he gives himself to science? Certainly, from the point of view of theology, it is not hard to see that there has entered into this point of view a certain leaven of confusion which may be dispersed by one or two not very recondite distinctions. There is, first of all, the distinction between "Theology" and "Systematic Theology." "Theology" is a broader thing than any one of its constituent parts. It includes "Apologetical Theology," "Exegetical Theology," "Historical Theology," "Practical Theology," as well as "Systematic Theology." The scientific character of "Theology" culminates in "Systematic Theology," which is, therefore, by eminence the scientific theological discipline. There may be a sense, therefore, in which it might be said of "Systematic Theology," with better right than of Theology at large, that it has its end in itself and seeks nothing but knowledge. But even here, this can be said only when Systematic Theology is abstracted from its sister disciplines and conceived sharply from the point of sight of the specific part committed to it in the general

theological task. To "Systematic Theology" is committed that part of the common theological task which is expressed by the phrase "to make wise;" while to "Practical Theology" is committed that other part, which is expressed by the phrase "unto salvation." The intellectualistic motive may thus be said to dominate in "Systematic Theology." But "Systematic Theology" does not exist by itself or for itself. It is a member of an organism, and it exists for the organism of which it is a part and in which it plays its part for the benefit of the whole. And the action of the whole culminates in, and all the functioning of the parts press on towards the vital effect made operative in "Practical Theology." The scientific character of Theology, so far from clashing with its practical issue, therefore, is one of the elements working towards this practical issue.

A far more fruitful distinction encourages us, however, in the twofold meaning of the word "knowledge." Theology has "Knowledge" for its end the "knowledge of God." But "Knowledge" there is a shallower and a deeper sense of the word "knowledge"—a purely intellectualistic sense, and a sense that involves the whole man and all his activities. "To know God" in the deeper sense is not the act of the mere understanding, nor can theology fulfil its function of making man "to know God" simply by framing propositions for the logical intellect. As Aesthetics or Ethics cannot fulfil its calling without calling into action something much deeper than the mere understanding, no more can Theology. For Ethics there is requisite a moral nature and that not merely in possession, but in

use: Aesthetics does not consist in a series of propositions about beauty, but in the active functioning of the sense of beauty; and similarly Theology does not exist when only the intellect is busied with the apprehension of logical propositions about God, but can come into existence only in beings that possess religious natures and through the actions of the religious faculty. The knowledge of God, accordingly, which it is the end of Theology to produce, is that vital knowledge of God which engages the whole man; it can terminate only in distinctively *religious* knowledge—and this adjective must needs describe the quantity of knowledge as well as its sphere. As well say that a being without a moral nature can produce a scientific ethic, or a being without sense of beauty can produce a scientific aesthetic, as to say that a being without religious nature, or without his religious nature stirred and in action, can produce a Scientific Theology. "Science" in no one of these cases consists of a bare series of intellectual propositions, however logically constructed.

It is but a corollary from this to say that the Science of Theology, that it may be a Science, must produce a religious "Theology" effect,—or, in more popular language, "a Effect. practical effect." It is rooted in the very nature of Theology as a Science that it should involve and impinge on the religious life: and the function of "Theology" is not completed as a Science until this practical end is subserved. It is evident, therefore, that a department of "Practical Theology" is essential to the *scheme* of Theology, and indeed constitutes its culmination and goal. Were there no

department of "Practical Theology," provision for the application of the truths philosophically contemplated in "Systematic Theology" would need to be made within the limits of Systematic Theology itself, that it should not hang incompletely in the air. There is no "Theology" that does not touch and move that religious nature by the movement of which alone may God be really known.

It follows, still further, that there is much that passes current as "Theology" that is not Theology at all.

Secular Theologizing No "Theology."

All that does not naturally take its place in the general scheme of investigation which tends to produce a true and vital knowledge of God—a truly *religious* knowledge of God—lies outside of the limits of "Theology." Says a recent French writer, Mr. Varicher, with great justice:

"We recognize the possible existence of profane sciences treating of the same material (with theology),—of an exegesis which strikes the primitive Christian documents independently of their religious value, of a history of the church which is only a branch of general history. Theology loses nothing by the recognition of the possibility of these sciences; it rather gains by not considering as theological certain works which to-day pretend to be such, but in their whole tendency and point of view, have no right to that honor" (*Methodologie, &c.*, p. 261).

Nothing could be more true. It is against good taste to suppose that a work belongs to the domain of "Theology" merely because it deals with a topic with which Theology may deal, or that a man has earned a title to the great name of "Theologian" because he has written, say, the life of some mediæval monk, or even a life of Christ. There are purely secular lives of Christ; purely secular investigations of the text and even contents of Scripture.

Theology, therefore, not only may

remain a science while yet "practical" in aim; it cannot even exist without this "practical" aim. As long as we remain in the region of the pure intellect we remain out of the proper region of Theology. Theology is the product of, appeals to, and impinges on the religious elements in man's nature, and nothing is "Theology" which does not move in this sphere. W.

Old Testament Notes.

Who shall teach us about teaching, if not that master teacher, Dr. W. R. Harper? Hence, when he begins to expound the Bible method of teaching we are all attention. "The Story As a Method of Teaching." When he declares that, "The wealth of pedagogical material to be found in the Scriptures is beyond computation," we feel the peculiar satisfaction which one always experiences when he finds his own views confirmed by a high authority. And when he declares that the story is one of the methods which the Bible employs in teaching—we listen closely to be sure that we understand exactly what he means. "Bible stories" have been familiar to us from our childhood. In our maturer years also, we have become familiar with a series of very excellent books known as *The Story of The Nations*. Hence the term story, as applied to the narratives of Scripture, does not in the least offend us.

There is no question that Dr. Harper, along with the generation of the righteous generally, holds Bible stories in high esteem. He recognizes "the almost perfect form employed in these

Theology Essentially Practical.

Deserved Praise.