

# UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

A Presbyterian Quarterly

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ADDRESS:

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Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.

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Please give notice of change of address

Published four times a year—January, April, July and October. Annual subscription, \$1.50; foreign, \$1.75. Single copies, 40 cents.

Entered at the Post-Office at Richmond, Va., as second-class matter.

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THE RICHMOND PRESS, INC., PRINTERS

make both ends meet. In Birmingham the wife of a curate was found at work as a charwoman. A London minister with six children has learned to repair boots to make a little extra cash in his spare time.—Associated Press item, September 3, 1928. Minister with scanty compensation, stand fast; the same sufferings are accomplished by your brethren who are in the world!

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## RITSCHLIANISM.

BY REV. DAVID S. CLARK, D. D.,  
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Professor in the Philadelphia School for Christian Workers  
of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.*

Dr. Clark is the author of one of the best brief books on systematic theology, "A Syllabus of Systematic Theology", \$2.25. This book is used as a text in the Course on Christian Doctrine in the Assembly's Training School, Richmond, Va. His latest book is entitled, "The Message from Patmos", a clear, concise, scholarly exposition of the Book of Revelation. These books may be ordered through the Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Box 1176, Richmond, Va.—Editor.

The motive of Ritschl in projecting his theological system was highly laudable. It is not improper for a dyed-in-the-wool fundamentalist to say so. Much as we may differ from Ritschl, and deplore the development of his system, we can but commend the purpose in the mind of its author. Only one deeply imbued with love for the Christian faith, and earnestly desirous of its preservation, would have labored as he did to place it beyond the reach of destructive forces. It is beyond question that Ritschl was a man of deep religious convictions and whole-heartedly attached to Christianity; and this is what impelled him to his career.

That he did not accomplish what he desired, that his system has been, as we think, detrimental to the highest form of Christian faith, was not the fault of his sincerity or earnestness, but of his presuppositions and method. The aim of

Ritschl was to put the content of Christian faith beyond the reach of scientific criticism and metaphysical speculation. He conceived that if Christian doctrine is to be secure it must be removed from the sphere of reason, and wholly divorced from the influence of philosophy. He had seen how faith had been affected by a materialistic science, and how the philosophies of the Absolute, especially that of Hegel, with their interminable speculations and obscure terminology, had emptied Christianity of most of its meaning. He concluded that the truth must be delivered from such dangerous associations and preserved inviolate for the religious man, be he peasant or sage.

It is to be observed that the term "faith" in this discussion is used in its widest latitude. We are accustomed to use the word in two senses, first as subjective faith, expressing an activity of the soul or the exercise of a faculty, as when we say: "My faith looks up to thee"; and second, as objective faith expressing the object on which faith terminates, or the contents of our religious beliefs, as when we say: "I have kept the faith", or "the faith once for all delivered to the saints". In this discussion faith generally connotes Christian belief;—all the propositions embraced in the creeds of the Christian. So Ritschl addressed himself to the task of safeguarding this heritage of faith. To this end faith must be divorced from metaphysics. They must be kept in separate and water-tight compartments of the human mind. This is the first presupposition of Ritschlianism.

But this was an impossible task at the outstart. Faith cannot be divorced from all metaphysical considerations, and the attempt to do so involved in itself an amount of technical metaphysical discussion that rivals Locke, Kant, or Edwards. It will be readily recognized that the very suggestion involves a whole epistemology or theory of knowledge. As a matter of fact, Ritschl fell back on the teachings of Kant to sustain his positions; and the Ritschlians of the present day show a bias for Kantian arguments.

As a further matter of fact, Ritschlianism has not secured faith against discussion or attack from the side of reason,

science, or metaphysics. The present-day facts bear all too sad evidence on the other side. If Ritschl hoped that faith could be thus safeguarded, it was a vain dream. The questions of the supernatural, of miracles, of historical facts that lie at the basis of Christianity, were bound to reappear and become subjects of discussion despite the water-tight partitions that were thought to separate faith from reason. Harnack pointed this out long ago, and what Harnack prophesied has come true.

Furthermore, the question was bound to arise whether that which was false in reason or science could be true in faith; or whether that which was false in the realm of faith might be maintained in the realm of reason. Can a man believe with one side of his nature what he disbelieves with another side of his nature? Must not man as a thinking personality stand on one side or another? Is it possible that a man's reason should never affect his faith, or that his moral nature should have no influence whatsoever in determining judgments arrived at by his rational faculties? In other words, is it possible to make the supposedly water-tight compartments absolutely water-tight? This paradox was frankly accepted by some of Ritschl's ablest followers who held that the resurrection of Christ, for example, might be accepted as a religious truth while utterly untenable as a scientific one.

Another question arose in the discussion of this fundamental position, namely, whether faith should accept the support of reason. Are the judgments of faith stronger because reason acquiesces in them? Shall we bring to the support of our faith any arguments drawn from reason or science or the objective world? Or must the religious faculty decline any alliance with the other powers of the mind, or any knowledge drawn from an extraneous sphere? It may be remembered as a historical fact that this was the situation from which rationalism grew out of the philosophy of Christian Wolff. On these subjects there was difference of opinion, and Ritschlianism soon faced insurmountable difficulties in maintaining its original position, of the entire divorce of faith and reason.

Perhaps the term most familiar in discussions of Ritschlian-

ism is that of value-judgments. If faith is to be divorced from reason and from all scientific and philosophic considerations, how is religious truth to be determined? What is the rule which determines the truth of a doctrine whether in harmony with or contradicted by reason? And the answer is value-judgment. A subjective evaluation is the touchstone of Ritschlian faith. Ritschl's theory of knowledge was so subjectivistic, so nearly an idealism, that it is not strange that he made subjective evaluation the touchstone of faith. But this evaluation proceeds on the ground of faith\* in Jesus Christ. For any particular doctrine to come into the category of religious belief it must be subjected to the evaluation of a Christian faith. But if every doctrine must be determined by Christian faith, what determines the faith?

Here is where a purely subjective method finds difficulty. Some of our theologians dismiss all objective proofs for the existence of God and base their belief on a mystical or subjective ground. And when they are met with the assertion that their beliefs are mere fancies, with no reality in fact, they are hard put to it to furnish a convincing answer. Now two arguments are always better than one; and the congruity of evidence drawn from opposite fields immeasurably strengthens the assurance. Subjective facts may rest on a subjective basis, but objective facts are better accredited by objective support.

The question arises whether value-judgments determine the reality of an object or only the worth of it. There is some vagueness about this point, but from various expressions we will endeavor to abstract the meaning. Did Ritschl hold that reality was of little consequence, and that faith's task was to estimate value and not reality? Or did he hold that faith reached a certitude in regard to the reality on which it laid hold, but on different grounds and by different processes than those which guaranteed certitude in the sphere of rational cognition? The question comes to the surface in what he says about God. His words are these: "To be sure it is main-

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\*Here faith is used in the subjective sense.

tained that we must know the being of God in order that we may affirm his value for us." And if he had stopped there that would be plain enough. But he adds: "On the contrary, we know the being of God only within his value for us." Kaftan, one of his ardent disciples, seems to scent difficulty here, and feels that religious concepts might be left entirely to the caprice of the human mind, and protests that the objective validity of religious truth must not be imperiled. He evidently thought that Ritschl did so.

A few sentences from Professor H. R. Mackintosh are applicable here. He says: "Ritschl's task was to prove that faith does not concern itself about the independently real existence of its objects, but looks only to the value for the self of this or that reality when drawn down to the subjective level." This language appears to say that faith cares nothing for objective reality, but only for the value of the idea. He says again: "*Reason* finds the ground of knowledge in the constraint of objective fact. *Faith* finds the ground, and the only valid ground, of belief in the transcendent worth of the object." This language leaves it open to say that faith does reach the reality of its object, but on its own grounds entirely apart from reason. Again he says: "If we make explicit the syllogism which lies at the basis of Ritschlianism it runs somewhat as follows: What is of religious value is real; God is of religious value, ergo God exists. The argument depends for its very existence upon the previous conclusion that intellectual experience has utterly failed to bring us within sight of the Divine. Faith must cast off the last shred of connection with knowledge; Herrmann indeed takes great pains to make it clear beyond all possibility of doubt that faith is concerned with a reality absolutely dis severed from the real which is given in knowledge, and that to attempt to unite the two is nothing short of sacrilege."

From this it appears that faith apprehends reality and reaches it through the sense of worth or value, in contradistinction to the reality reached by rational processes, according to pure Ritschlianism. But the question still persists. how much

objectivity pertains to the reality reached by faith, seeing that Ritschl was so subjectivistic in his epistemology as to approach idealism?

If feeling is made the norm of religious truth, who shall decide when feelings disagree? One man may deem it good to burn for his faith, and another may deem it good to save his skin. Values may seem exactly opposite to different men. One man may find pleasure in a lofty conception of God, and another in an unworthy conception. The predilection of the individual is an insecure guarantee of truth; and Ritschlianism left faith too much to the latitude of fortuitous caprice.

But Christianity could not be divorced from objective and historical facts even by Ritschl. Christianity is a historical religion. Christ was a historical person. Ritschl accordingly went, and rightly, to the Scriptures for the basis on which Christianity was founded. But this might give rise to the very difficulties from which he sought to deliver Christian faith. This would introduce questions about which there might be serious discussion and differences of opinion. This would call in reason to settle matters of faith, and what would become of the divorce of faith and reason? Questions of Christ's person, teachings, works, death, resurrection, and a hundred others would enter into the complex of any theological system based on historical considerations.

The way out of this dilemma was sought by submitting the historical stock-in-hand to the arbitrament of the subjective evaluation. Faith was to pronounce judgment, estimate the value, and fix the place of all things contained in the record of Jesus. That is to be accepted which appeals to the individual, or to the Christian community, as of worth to the spiritual life. Or in common parlance, that is true which I judge to be good for me. This was the yardstick to measure all goods. But this gives to faith a cognitive power. The question may justly be raised whether the element of reason is not introduced into the compartment of faith by the method itself, and whether Ritschl could divorce theology from metaphysics as much as he supposed.

Ritschl wavered somewhat on the question whether reason might not support the conclusions of faith; even denied that he intended to exclude *all* metaphysics from faith, yet the distinguishing article of his creed was the separation of faith from other modes of cognition. At any rate, the Scriptures and all they contain were marked up or down, in or out, by the authority of the value judgment.

If we should ask for one word to describe Ritschlianism what should it be? Should we say rationalism? Perhaps Ritschl himself, with considerable heat, would repudiate that term. Rationalism was the thing that Ritschl was trying to avoid. His aim in life was to deliver Christianity from reasoned antitheses and philosophical speculations. The term that most nearly defines his system is the word subjectivism. He approaches Schleiermacher rather than Wolff and Semler. In fact, I think that Ritschl was only an amended edition of Schleiermacher, who sought to cure rationalism by an appeal to the feelings. But these distinctions, while formally and technically real, are of slight value; and between the two there is little to choose.

Two criticisms have been passed on Ritschlianism which we may notice here. The first is that it makes religion to center in man. This is due to its semi-idealism. While Ritschl repudiated Hegel, yet Kant and Lotze remained. His system was therefore not so much Theocentric, or Christocentric, as anthropocentric. Another criticism was that Ritschlianism has developed a pronounced antipathy to doctrine,—what some one has called dogmaphobia. Some have said that this was a natural reaction from a hyper-doctrinal attitude of post-Reformation times. It would seem to be due rather to the genius of Ritschlianism in seeking to place matters of faith beyond the reach of destructive criticism by founding them on a sense of value as estimated by a personal judgment. The position is one which may appeal to some minds confused by conflicting claims. But it is bound to be but a passing phase of theological opinion. The pendulum will swing back. Religion makes appeal to all the faculties of the human soul. Intellect, feeling, will, moral nature are all integral parts of the human complex.



Matters of faith cannot be confined to any one of them. Religious truth is no more one-sided than any other branch of knowledge. Doctrine cannot be eliminated from theology, or from religion, any more than the underlying principles can be taken away from medicine, jurisprudence and pedagogy. An intelligent mind will always demand an intelligent statement for its beliefs; and theology will certainly come to its own when disturbing elements have ceased to divert the needle from its pole.

Ritschl died in 1889. He was not long dead till his followers divided into two groups, the right and left wings. It was held by many that Ritschl gave too little weight to Biblical criticism which his own system had awakened and stimulated; that he put a rather dogmatic interpretation of his own on the Scriptures; disregarded claims of science; set aside the rights of reason to a place in determining religious truth. The extreme left of the left wing objected to an appeal to the historical groundwork of Christianity, holding that historical claims are the burden rather than the support of Christianity. The latter would divorce Christianity from historical facts, as requiring an apologetic from which Christianity might be delivered, and rest faith more than ever on pure subjectivity.

Ritschl's most illustrious followers in Germany were Julius Kaftan and Johann Herrmann, the latter especially a devout and high-minded man. He has been represented in America by Professor A. C. McGiffert and Professor George Burman Foster, late professor of the philosophy of religion in the University of Chicago, and belonging to the extreme left of the left wing.