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THE RITSCHLIAN VIEW OF REVELATION (*concluded*)

by LEONARD DE MOOR

TOWARDS the end of his previous instalment (January-March, 1970) Dr. De Moor expressed the opinion that an understanding of Ritschl's epistemology ("we know the thing in its appearances") is essential if we are to grasp the significance of his entire system. From there he now goes on to conclude that Ritschl paved the way for the doctrine of revelation associated with the dialectical theology of the twentieth century.

WE shall now dip down into the Ritschlian Systematics and bring up a few samplings. An analysis of these samples will reveal how omnipresent are the principles of this epistemology in this theological system, and how important for an understanding of the Ritschlian view of revelation.

First, there is Ritschl's attitude to mysticism. As he himself explains it,¹ his attitude thereto was determined by his acceptance of a functional, in place of what to him was the impossible "Scholastic psychology". But the type of psychology which he believed to be consistent with "an intelligible and practical Christianity" he expressly declares to be dependent upon the correct principles of "logic and epistemology" which together

constitute the "ratio" or "intellectus" without which . . . Divine Revelation cannot be comprehended at all, and in any case cannot be made the subject of theological exposition.²

In the field of psychology

there are two colliding views, which correspond respectively to the first (Platonic) and third (Lotzian) forms of the theory of knowledge. With the idea of the thing as remaining at rest behind its effects and qualities is bound up the Scholastic psychology, which is a principal factor in the theory of mysticism. Its assumption is that behind its special activities of feeling, thinking, and willing, the soul remains at rest in its self-equivalence, as the unity of its divine powers, the faculties. This level of the soul's existence, farther, is regarded as the region in which it experiences the operations of Divine grace. This self-enclosed life of the spirit, above all, is conceived as the scene of the "unio mystica", that indwelling of the

¹ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, E.T., Vol. III (New York, 1900), pp. 20-23.

² A. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, in which culminate all the gracious operations which our spirit undergoes.³

The importance of a correct theory of knowledge becomes at once evident, for

the separation of the activities of the soul from its unaffected faculties . . . is an error of the same kind as the distinction between the phenomenal effects of a thing and the thing in itself, unknowable as the latter is apart from its qualities. We know nothing of a self-existence of the soul, of a self-enclosed life of the spirit above or behind those functions in which it is active, living, and present to itself as a being of special worth.⁴

Besides, this is true Lutheranism, for

To the question: "Quid est habere deum?" Luther answers, not: "Inhabitatio totius trinitatis in homine credente": he answers with psychological correctness that for man the possession of God consists in his active trust in God as the highest good. While, therefore, God communicates Himself to man in order to his salvation, the experience is not an object of knowledge in such a way as to be fixed and explained in this form; rather it is evidenced by an activity of the human spirit in which feeling, knowing, and willing, combine in an intelligible order.⁵

The view that the soul is a substance in which inhere attributes and qualities, which has an existence prior to and independent of its activities and functions, Ritschl therefore definitely rejects, and with it mysticism, which he associated therewith.

He also makes explicit the important bearing this all has upon our problem of revelation: how, in revelation, the objective and subjective are to be conceived as related, how the divine content and the human organs of reception are related in that event which we call revelation. We are told that

We must give up the question . . . derived from Scholastic psychology, but insoluble . . . how man is laid hold of, or pervaded, or filled by the Holy Spirit. What we have to do is rather to verify life in the Holy Spirit by showing that believers know God's gracious gifts, that they call on God as their Father, that they act with love and joy, with meekness and self-control, that they are on their guard above all against party spirit, and cherish rather a spirit of union.⁶

"Thinghood" must therefore be viewed from a functional standpoint. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit is denied. Only there devolves on scientific theology the task of verifying everything

³ A. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴ A. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 21; cf. note 1, p. 399, in which one of Luther's sermons is so interpreted. For another interpretation see Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Erster Halbband (Chr. Kaiser, München, 1932), pp. 439f.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ A. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, pp. 22f.

which is cognisable as belonging to the gracious operations of God upon the Christian.⁷

We know the Holy Spirit, and the whole of God's revelation, only as reflected in the experiences and acts of believers.

The impression that the thing is a unity in the changes of the qualities springs from our persistent sense of unity amid the succession of our sensations produced by the thing.⁸

In this last quotation, however, the last four words tend to nullify the import of the preceding, which as such is the usual Ritschlian explanation; the doctrine of the subjective origin of the thing. Here, however, he plainly adds that the thing is itself the cause or origin of our sensations. It is difficult to see how these two conceptions are to be reconciled. In his psychology we are left with the same unresolved problem as in his theory of knowledge; the relation of knowledge and existence. This problem is not cleared up by such formulas as Ritschl was accustomed to use that "we know the thing in its appearances", that the soul is "an intelligible order" of functions and activities. For it is difficult to understand how appearances, functions, and activities, which cannot transcend the phenomenal sphere, can be thought to usher us into the presence of the real when they are by definition thus confined. And if the venture is made of saying that appearances have a noumenal reference, it is difficult to understand how this term "reference" can guarantee any ontological reality to the noumenal thus referred to. For "the real" is always given in terms of the empirical, whereas divine grace, though rightly considered the source of human experience, should at the same time also be conceived as transcending it. To do so, however, would in Ritschl's opinion be a reversion to Scholasticism. It is therefore difficult to understand how Ritschl can get outside of the circle of finite experience, and assert the existence of the noumenal as even the source of revelation. This further appears when we turn to Ritschl's conception of God. We are again reminded that the Scholastic tradition in theology starts us off with certain definitions and declarations about God and man, and then in the course of time brings us to a consideration of the effect of the Spirit of God, thus defined, upon human life in its active functions. We are told that this method is just the opposite from the true one. We can

⁷ A. Ritschl, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁸ A. Ritschl, *Theologie und Metaphysik* (Bonn, 21887), p. 38: "Der Eindruck, dass das wahrgenommene Ding in dem Wechsel seiner Merkmale Eins ist, entspringt . . . der Continuität des Selbstgefühls innerhalb der Reihenfolge unserer durch das Ding erregten Empfindungen".

know nothing of God, Christ's redemption, or the Holy Spirit who brings about this redemption, apart from the experience of redemption in the hearts of believers who compose the Christian community. These experiences are the open windows by means of which we get an insight into the being of God, an understanding of His reality or actuality. Consequently, Ritschl places as the key to his system the words "Whosoever willeth to do the will of God, shall know that the doctrine of Christ is true" (John 7: 17).⁹ The knowledge of God is inseparable from ethical and spiritual experience.¹⁰ For,

apart from this value-judgment of faith there exists no knowledge of God worthy of this content. So that we ought not to strive after a purely theoretical and "disinterested" knowledge of God, as an indispensable preliminary to the knowledge of faith. To be sure, people say that we must first know the nature of God and Christ ere we can ascertain their worth for us . . . The truth rather is that we know the nature of God and Christ only in their worth for us. For God and faith are inseparable conceptions; faith, however, confessedly does not consist in abstract knowledge, or knowledge which deals with merely historical facts.¹¹

After a discussion of the attempted theoretical proofs of the existence of God which he rejects as impossible, Ritschl concludes that

For religious cognition the existence of God is beyond question, for the activity of God becomes to us a matter of conviction through the attitude we take to the world as religious men.¹²

His exposition of the correct God-concept as given in *Theologie and Metaphysik* is agreement with this. Here he tells us that

If God belongs to the objects of knowledge for scientific theology, every claim that we can learn something of God in Himself, which is recognizable for us apart from a revelation which He has in some way made and which is perceived and experienced by us, is without sufficient ground.¹³

For

in this circumference of the reality of the spiritual life alone can the operations of God which religion established also be understood. But as we can understand even God only in His operations upon us,

⁹ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 25.

¹⁰ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 342.

¹¹ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 212.

¹² A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 218.

¹³ A. Ritschl, *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 34: "Gehört nun zu den Erkenntnisobjecten der wissenschaftlichen Theologie Gott, so ist jeder Anspruch, dass man etwas von Gott an sich lehren könne, was abgesehen von seiner irgendwie beschaffenen aber von uns empfundenen und wahrgenommenen Offenbarung für uns erkennbar wäre, ohne zureichenden Grund".

which corresponds to His open revelation, so we recognize in these operations the presence of God for us.¹⁴

The result is that all possibility of speaking of an absolute nature in the Deity as the ground of His historical manifestations is in Ritschlianism swept aside. It is impossible to speak about the inherent attributes in God, or of such inner distinctions in His essential Being as are implied in the ordinary doctrine of the Trinity. All this is considered by Ritschl as "metaphysical", and as such having no lawful place in Christian theology. Logically, the Being of God can have very little more significance than to serve as a general expression for the moral government of the world. God is lost in His communicable, His transitive attributes. The Deity is a personification of the Divine in which all human beings share. The aseity of God, as spoken of in theology, has no place in such a system.

The assertions which are made regarding God, as He was before the world and before the moral order existed for man, are either purely formal determinations which have no force until the content of revelation is taken into account, e.g. the conception of the personality of God—or they are words without meaning.¹⁵

It is indeed remarkable, that, as in this last passage, Ritschl asserts a belief in the personality of God, while at the same time denying inherent, incommunicable, or absolute attributes to Him. The latter are generally conceived as constitutive of divine personality. But the explanation is that "God as a Person" meant for him, One

who establishes the Kingdom of God as the final end of the world, and in it assures to every one who trusts in Him supremacy over the world.¹⁶

Personality for Ritschl was a relational term, and as applied to God it referred to his loving will, experienced by believers, enabling them to call him Father.¹⁷ The other conception of God, which views him as a Being who could be thought to have an existence transcending these moral relations with men, he branded as materialistic and idolatrous.¹⁸

¹⁴ A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 48: "In diesem Umkreise der Wirklichkeit des geistigen Lebens können allein auch die Wirkungen Gottes verstanden werden, welche die Religion feststellt. Wie wir aber auch Gott nur in seinen Wirkungen auf uns, die seiner öffentlichen Offenbarung entsprechen, erkennen können, so erkennen wir eben in diesen Wirkungen die Gegenwart Gottes für uns".

¹⁵ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 239.

¹⁶ A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁷ A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 273.

¹⁸ A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, pp. 237f.

From a first reading one might conclude that in the Ritschlian thought of Christ a more objective point of view is maintained. For there is a constant reiteration of the position that Christ as an historical person is the object of the faith of the Christian. But it is important to note how the historicity of Christ is conceived. One of the most prominent disciples of Ritschl has expressed this unambiguously.

When we speak of the historical Christ we mean that personal life of Jesus which speaks to us from the New Testament, viewed as the disciples' testimony to their faith.¹⁹

Apart from the faith of the disciples, and apart from our own faith, the historical reality of the person of Christ is a needless point of speculation. The only important and vital concern is what Christ means for inner faith.

We can discover the full compass of His historical actuality solely from the faith of the Christian community. Not even His purpose to found the community can be quite understood historically save by one who, as member of it, subordinates himself to His Person.²⁰ Hence it is not important to be assured that the New Testament record is an essentially trustworthy and inerrant historical record of the deeds of Jesus upon earth, in which a history of redemption has come to its realization and fulfilment. Instead, it should be viewed as the record of evaluation which the disciples placed upon their inner sense of trust in Jesus.

Christ's Godhead is not a fact objectively given, which remains constant regardless of a person's attitude to Him:

Christ cannot be the object of our trust if the description of Him in the Creed is meant to be understood in a sense purely objective.²¹

Ritschl teaches that this is also true Lutheranism. For

Luther's statements in the Catechisms amount to this, that while the Church formula is retained, it really is in Christ's human achievements that His Godhead becomes for His people manifest, conspicuous, intelligible, winning our faith, not in the form of assent to an unintelligible dogma but of personal trust for our own salvation.²²

His Godhead depends in all seriousness upon whether He is experienced as such by those who stand in a relation of trust to Him. If He has the value of the Godhead for them, that constitutes His Deity.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, E.T. of 2nd revised German edition by J. Sandys Stanyon (Williams and Norgate, London, 1895), p. 64.

²⁰ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 3.

²¹ A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 392.

²² A. Ritschl, *ibid.*, p. 394.

All questions with regard to the origin of the person (i.e. any doctrine of pre-existence), His death, resurrection, and ascension as historical deeds, have absolutely no meaning for the Christian.²³ They have meaning only as they expressed a faith of the first disciples; but if they do not awaken faith in our inner being today, they are not revelations.

We must understand the Godhead of Christ, if it is to be understood at all, as an attribute revealed to us in His saving influence upon ourselves.²⁴

Previous to this personal religious experience no theological formula which seeks to prove the divinity of Christ *a priori* can impress us that Christ is divine. Moreover

the traditional record may appear doubtful; but the essential contents of that record, namely, the inner life of Jesus, have the power to convince the conscience that that life is an undeniable fact. That means everything.²⁵

Of such primary and exclusive importance is this value, which individuals come to feel that Christ has for them as a revelation of God, that all metaphysical explanations or theories as to the relation sustained between Christ and God, whom He reveals, are believed to be superfluous.

The origin of the Person of Christ—how His Person attained the form in which it presents itself to our ethical and religious apprehension—is not a subject for theological inquiry, because the problem transcends all inquiry. What ecclesiastical tradition offers us in this conception is obscure in itself, and therefore is not fitted to make anything clear. As bearer of the perfect revelation, Christ is given us that we may believe on Him. When we do believe on Him, we find Him to be the Revealer of God. But the correlation of Christ with God His Father is not a scientific explanation. And as a theologian one ought to know that the fruitless clutching after such explanations only serves to obscure the recognition of Christ as the perfect revelation of God.²⁶

The Ritschlians were, therefore, strongly opposed to the separation which had been made in traditional theology between the person and work of Christ. According to them we know the person only through the work. This desire to safeguard the genuine humanity of Jesus led Ritschl to reject the high Christology of the creeds. This simplifies the Christological problem immensely. But the question that remains is whether such a purely moral and religious conception of Christ's person is adequate.

But before we proceed to a critical evaluation of Ritschlianism,

²³ W. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, p. 66.

²⁴ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 398.

²⁵ W. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, p. 183.

²⁶ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, pp. 451f.

it will serve the useful purpose of bringing the issues of this chapter to a head if a synopsis be presented of a small but significant treatise of Wilhelm Herrmann, entitled *The Concept of Revelation*. This affords us a direct statement of Ritschlian views upon the topic of our study.

If we want to see what revelation is, then we must give heed to this, how revelation becomes certain to us, and helps us . . . The true sense of such words (*ἀποκαλύπτειν* and *φανεροῦν*) we first grasp only when we experience in ourselves, how that which we have long called revelation changes for us out of something old and familiar into something incomprehensibly new.²⁷

In the same empirical tone he continues that revelation is something which can bring us out of our deepest needs into a sense of full and complete satisfaction, where we experience a power which gives victory over temptation. That is revelation.²⁸

Not only do outward temptations give us unrest, but what is more disconcerting is the fact that there is present with us a gnawing self-condemnation, which issues from a sense of guilt. Now

what in such a state and in such a manner should present itself as something never yet experienced, that we could in all truth call revelation.²⁹

Whatever enters into our experience, giving us victory over temptation, freeing us from a guilty conscience, and breaking the shackles of some old loyalty which had been keeping us in subjection, is revelation.³⁰ It is not an historical event of the distant past, but a personal experience in the immediate present.

It is false to view the Scriptures as a depository of revelation, because even such an acquiescence would itself make no difference in one's life. And whatever does not produce a change in one's life in the direction of the attainment of higher moral achievement, cannot be termed revelation.³¹

²⁷ Wilhelm Herrmann, *Der Begriff der Offenbarung*, 2. Auflage (Vortrag zu Giessen, 1887; A. Töpelmann, 1908), pp. 4f.: "Wollen wir sehen, was die Offenbarung ist, so müssen wir darauf achten, wie die Offenbarung uns gewiss wird und uns hilft . . . Den wirklichen Sinn solcher Worte (*ἀποκαλύπτειν* und *φανεροῦν*) erfassen wir doch erst, wenn wir an uns selbst erfahren, wie das, was wir längst Offenbarung genannt haben, uns aus etwas alt Gewohntem zu etwas unbegreiflich Neuem wird".

²⁸ W. Herrmann, *Der Begriff* . . . , p. 5.

²⁹ W. Herrmann, *Der Begriff* . . . , p. 6: "Was uns in solcher Lage und in solcher Weise als etwas nie Erlebtes vorkäme, das könnten wir mit innerer Wahrhaftigkeit Offenbarung nennen".

³⁰ W. Herrmann, *ibid.*, p. 6.

³¹ W. Herrmann, *ibid.*, pp. 9 and 12.

And Jesus becomes for us the revelation of God "through everything whereby he constrains us to trust him". He obliges us, indeed compels us to trust Him in two regards: first, in that He discloses to us the (true) "good" and makes the claim that He has made actual in the world that "good";

and secondly, in that

He lives in undisturbed confidence upon the love of a God whom he acknowledged as the holy potency of the "good".³²

Therefore

for the person who trusts Him, there comes to attach to the reality of Jesus the reality of a power over all things, which sees to it that one attains the victory in his struggles . . . In this way Jesus becomes for us a redeeming revelation of God. His presence in our world becomes for us understandable as the fact in which God Himself turns to us. This revelation consists herein, that we have come to know a power which places us in the very presence of God and upholds us, whenever anxiety (*Not*) and sin would fain cast us into the bottomless deep.³³

Revelation, then, is that which produces such consequences in us as to give us victory over all the forces that would keep us, as personalities, in subjection, and which in addition enables us to lay hold on the highest good. The objective source of that which accomplishes this in us is called God, and Jesus Christ is considered the vehicle for the conveyance of that assurance which gives us the courage to venture to appropriate for ourselves "the good" which He has rendered it possible for us to experience. Christ is, therefore, not in the strictest sense of the word the object of revelation. He is rather the "permanent possibility" by means of which there is brought to awakening, in the believer, an active appropriation of what is needed to meet the needs of life. Revela-

³² W. Herrman, *ibid.*, pp. 19f.: "Er wird dies durch alles das, wodurch er uns nötigt, ihm zu vertrauen . . . Jesus enthüllt uns das Gute und macht den Anspruch, dass er das Gute in der Welt wirklich mache . . . Er lebt in ungetrübter Zuversicht zu der Liebe eines Gottes, den er als die heilige Macht des Guten erkannt hat".

³³ W. Herrmann, *ibid.*, pp. 22f.: "An die ihm offenbar gewordene Wirklichkeit Jesus knüpft sich für den Menschen, der ihm vertraut, die Wirklichkeit einer Macht über alle Dinge, die dafür sorgt, dass er mit seiner Sache zum Siege kommt . . . In solcher Weise wird für den Christen die Gewissheit von Gott begründet und getragen durch Jesus Christus. Und diese Gewissheit wird uns zu einer Erlösung . . . So wird uns Jesus zu einer erlösenden Offenbarung Gottes. Sein Dasein in unserer Welt wird uns als die Tatsache verständlich, in welcher Gott selbst sich uns zuwendet. Diese Offenbarung Gottes macht uns zu neuen Menschen. Denn dadurch sind wir neue Menschen, dass wir eine Macht kennen, die uns in die Gegenwart Gottes stellt und uns emporhält, wenn Not und Sünd uns ins Bodenlose hinabziehen wollen".

tion is consistently conceived in pragmatic terms. Revelation is to be known by its fruits, its impartation of fulness of life. It is a present experience of moral victory over all the odds of life external and internal. Jesus serves as a revelation of God in the sense that He has always been recognized by the Christian community as the perfect model of such victory over the world, and can become such for us, too, if we trust that His way can be duplicated in us.

Like the other writings of the Ritschlians, this brochure of Herrmann's shows the influence of Kant. Like him, these theologians divided reality into the two irreconcilable spheres of nature and spirit. Over the first the laws of mechanics hold sway, and here everything is determined. In this field moral personality, the highest good, is unattainable. But in the realm of spirit, which as moral personalities we experience to be exempt from the iron-clad laws of necessity, a moral law is operative which is afforded all the freedom necessary for the attainment of a spiritual victory, even in the midst of an external world which in itself is indifferent, if not hostile to these interests. Every attempt to fit both realms of being into an ontological unity was put aside. In the end, the unity that was established by the Ritschlian school was accomplished by appropriating the teleological philosophy of Hermann Lotze. Here God who, as autonomous will, rules the world, is considered as guaranteeing this unity of nature and spirit in the fact that He governs the sphere of nature in the interest of the moral world. Christ, as the revealer of God, who by definition is spiritual-moral-will, is the revealer of God in this very capacity.³⁴ It will be recognized that this is not the emphasis which determined the Ritschlian theology.

It would be incorrect and invalid to say that there is no virtue in pointing out the distinction, as the Ritschlians certainly have done, between what is theoretical, scientific, metaphysical, and theological on the one hand, and practical, ethical, and religious on the other. And if the Ritschlians only meant to say that there is one unitary truth of which the theoretical and practical are but two aspects, no one would seriously object. But to teach, as they do, that knowledge is necessarily to be divided into two independent sections, in one of which natural physical laws describe all phenomena, while in the other, value-judgments rule, is to undermine the unity of thought. It is psychologically impossible for a

³⁴ Werner Wiesner, *Das Offenbarungsproblem in der dialektischen Theologie* (Chr. Kaiser, München, 1930), pp. 18f.

rational man to hold for truth a piece of religious or ethical knowledge which the theoretical reason pronounces false or impossible. Human nature is not constructed with such watertight compartments. In fact, there is no such thing as a "value-judgment" pure and simple. Every such judgment has a reference, tacit or explicit, to an actual object.

"Judgments of value" do not hang in the air; they are connected with real objects. If I pass an aesthetic judgment on a beautiful flower, I affirm in the act the existence of the flower, the knowledge of which is given in perception.³⁵

And since the central question of Christianity, as of every religion, is the doctrine of salvation, it is impossible to conceive the problem itself without an answer to the questions: what the world is which needs to be redeemed, who the person is who redeems, how He came to be the being He is, and how He is able to save. These are intricate problems, and Ritschl declines to discuss them because he holds to a theology which will have nothing to do with metaphysical questions.

Religion, therefore, while admittedly not primarily of theoretic origin, does call forth theoretic activities, and necessarily employs them in the apprehension of its objects; in collating, systematizing, and vindicating its own affirmations; in tracing their relation to truth in other spheres; and in seeking a scientific grounding of them in a general philosophy of religion and view of the world as a whole. And the Christian Church universal in this regard pursues a wiser course than is manifested in this dualism of the Ritschlians.

It does not base its faith on theoretic reason; but neither will it place reason under the ban, or refuse what friendly aid reason can give it. It will welcome light from all quarters. It will not think a doctrine condemned because, besides being Christian, it can likewise be shown to be rational. It will not dress itself in the garb of Greek wisdom; but it will rejoice with Paul in any word that Greek poets have said which corroborates its fuller testimony.³⁶

Closely related, and of one piece with this dualism, is the position which we have found constantly recurring in the Ritschlian literature: that theological doctrines must be considered in terms of the reflection or mirroring of divine grace in the religious subject. The necessity for this we have been told is that epistemologically we are necessarily confined to the content of perception. It will be necessary to test the theological validity

³⁵ James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith*² (Thomas Whittaker, New York, n.d., but must be around 1896-7), pp. 245f.

³⁶ James Orr, *ibid.*, pp. 242f.

of such a position.

No theologian will deny that it is a true and valuable thought, for the emphasizing of which much credit is due to Schleiermacher and Ritschl, that the facts of Christianity can only be rightly understood from the standpoint of faith and the experience of redemption. It was not difficult for Ritschl to find passages in the writings of all of the Reformers to show that the Reformation theology also teaches this. But the Reformers also retained their belief in the facts of the Christian religion; and they considered it the function of faith to assimilate the meaning thereof in personal experience.

When Ritschlians, therefore, say that no doctrine of Christ's Godhead can ever save a man, they are undoubtedly right. But when it is thereby implied that experience as such (the relation of which to "the real" is left unanswered) alone saves, we are in danger of running into the grave peril of subjectivity. The inference that all predication of Christ's Godhead, as declared in the Scriptures, the Christian Church and the creeds, is negligible, cannot stand. Because as soon as the Church ceases to believe in the Deity of Christ as an objective fact, there will no longer be those who will be able to experience His efficacy by way of effecting for them a redemption. How can there be faith when there is nothing objective and prior to the faith, in which one may put his trust?

An argument of Professor James Bissett Pratt in answer to Pragmatism is applicable here. He points out that a thing must be considered to be true in itself, and to possess that quality prior to its being verified in experience as the truth. The validation in experience is possible, and continues to be possible, only because that which is thus validated was true before it went through that process of verification. Applying this reasoning to a concrete case we should speak of God in Christ as an historically objective fact or truth, possessing that quality in His own right before, and as yet apart from the experience of believers. Faith and the resulting experience is the validation of the truth, but not the creation of the truth. When Christ becomes a vital part of the faith of the believer, the reason why He proves to be that living truth is because He exists as such. No one will deny that experience will decide whether Christ will have the value of Deity for a person. The only question is, whence does this personal conviction originate. If this question is to be given a serious answer, metaphysics cannot be avoided.

Every believer ought to recognize that God's revelation is far

beyond what he has as yet personally appropriated thereof. In Christ there exists a plenitude of revelation beyond the measure of anyone's experience hitherto, which others may have been enabled to appropriate in larger measure than any given individual, and which it should be one's aim to appropriate ever more and more fully for one's self. Indeed this divine revelation must be considered to extend in scope even beyond the total cumulative experience of all believers, not only of a given time, but of all times. God's revelation, as an objective source of life and truth, is not to be exhausted, no matter how heavily the Christian community draws upon it. God as the source and content of revelation cannot safely be made dependent upon man's knowing and receiving Him. And yet His purpose in creating us was that we might know and love Him. But though this revelation announces to us this intention and purpose of God, we may not therefore infer that He was under constraint thus to manifest Himself. Judging after the deed, we, on the receiving end, now know that it was His good pleasure to disclose Himself to us. But the prerogative, the initiative, was His: "We love Him, because He first loved us."

We conclude that the Ritschlian school does not make good its claim to look at all religious processes in man "from the standpoint of God".³⁷ As judged in the light of the system as a whole, there can be no doubt that the state of grace in the human subject became the sole criterion and index of what the human subject, in accordance therewith, postulates or surmises to be the nature of the divine source. Not only the attributes of the deity, but His very existence is therefore subordinated and made subservient to the inner experiences of satisfaction of humans. This does scant justice to the objective factor in the formula of revelation.

Of course, as we noted, the Ritschlians found themselves in an era which was setting itself in definite revolt against both the older Platonic-Aristotelian supernaturalistic world-view, and the younger speculative Hegelianism. Both movements had come into disfavour because of the too high regard that was had for intellectual concepts. But it is unfortunate that Ritschl and his school permitted themselves to be swept along with this current, and to seek to salvage Christianity by making for it such a modest claim that its prerogative of being a divinely sent revelation, possessing real metaphysical reality, was compromised. Such

³⁷ A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, Vol. III, p. 34.

exclusive emphasis was laid upon the knowledge-content of revelation that their psychology and epistemology of revelation failed to do justice to the problem of existence. The Ritschlian device of making peace between science and religion, by giving each its own independent sphere, may possibly be considered clever, but it is a most dangerous way of finding theological certainty, for in making it impossible to penetrate behind inner experience it constantly faces the danger of delusion.

The transition from the Ritschlian view of revelation to that of Karl Barth and his colleagues is easy to make, for, as one student of the concept has said:

without the work of the Ritschlian school . . . which attempts to carry this way of conceiving the doctrine of revelation to its logical end, one cannot conceive the dialectic theology.³⁸

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³⁸ Werner Wiesner, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22: "Ohne die Arbeit der Ritschlschen Schule . . . wäre die dialektische Theologie, die diesen Weg der Offenbarungslehre gerade zu Ende zu gehen versucht, nicht zu denken". Cf. L. De Moor, "The Concept of Revelation in Barthianism", *Journal of Religion* 17, No. 2, April, 1937.