

## Modern Positive Theology.

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### III.

#### Christology.

THERE is scarcely any conceivable shade of Christological opinion but has been advocated both in ancient and in modern times. Still there is a well-marked and far-reaching difference between the ancient Christology and the distinctively modern. The two move in different planes. Need we wonder, then, though they have not yet concurred? The ancient Christology, as it found classic expression in the Catholic Creeds, was theocentric,—some would say naïvely so. The modern, as inaugurated by Schleiermacher and developed by Ritschl is, consciously and of set purpose, anthropocentric. For the former, the problem was, How are we to construe God in His essential nature, so as to find a place there worthy of Him whom we with all believers acknowledge as our 'Lord' and 'God'? The dogma of the Trinity, with its allied Christological dogma of the two distinct natures and one Person, was the answer of the ancient Church—the 'Great' or 'Catholic' Church as distinguished from the sects and heresies, to this problem. We can confidently affirm that, *the presuppositions being granted*, it was the *best* and indeed the *only possible* answer.

Modern Christology, on the other hand, starts from the effects produced by Christ upon believers individually and collectively. It has for its data the total impression made by His personality upon the history of the world. Such data cannot easily be totalled up and appraised. But they furnish a starting-point for theology similar to that possessed by other sciences.

We do not need to accept the theological findings either of Schleiermacher or of Ritschl, in order to see that their work marks a decided advance in a scientific point of view. Christology can never again be satisfied with any *starting-point* less fundamental than theirs, however it may advance, as I believe it will and must, beyond their positive affirmations.

Meantime the fundamental question of Christology, for a theology resolved to be at once 'modern' and 'positive,' is whether we can pass

by a necessary or at least legitimate road from the anthropocentric to the theocentric plane. We must begin by determining what Christ is to us. How far, and by what means, if at all, can we determine what He is for God? Can we speculatively, or in any other way, pass from an economical to an immanent Trinity? Have we any interest, intellectual or religious, in making the attempt?

This brings us to the subject of the relation between metaphysics and theology, so much discussed a few years ago. Christian theologians are interested in the point mainly because of its Trinitarian and Christological bearings. Dr. Theodor Kaftan advocates a theology without metaphysics, and, consistently therewith, an anthropocentric Christology. In this respect, as in many others, he stands much nearer to modern theologians in general than Seeberg. Indeed, Grützmacher has disowned him, somewhat violently and ostentatiously as is his wont; while he himself acquiesces in the judgment, saying that Seeberg and his school understand by Modern Theology, not a New Theology, but only an old, modified in some particulars. Others have told him that he is simply a Ritschlian, and can get most of what he asks for, in his able and suggestive pamphlet, already to hand in a book published eleven years ago—the *Dogmatik* of his brother Julius. But so vigorous and independent a thinker probably knows his own mind more fully than his critics, and there are doubtless points of contrast of which he is conscious, but which he has not yet elaborated, as well as differences of accentuation so to speak, which we can all observe, to distinguish him from the Ritschlians.

Obviously we can pass from what Christ is to us to what He is in the eternal essence of the God-head, if at all, only by the steep and slippery Alpine path of metaphysics. To deny the legitimacy of metaphysics in theology is thus to break in principle with the Catholic doctrine of Christ's Person, as Schleiermacher and Ritschl both do, without admitting that they suffer any religious loss thereby, or that Christ is in any way less fully honoured.

The doctrine of Seeberg and his school regarding the Person of Christ is decidedly theocentric. Seeberg seeks to interpret Christ in terms of Will. This is doubtless to be explained by the circumstance that his main interests are soteriological, and not speculative, like those of the early *Logos* Christologians, or Dr. Inge, who in *Contentio Veritatis* gives us what is substantially an English *Modern Positive Christology* on the *Logos* basis. According to Seeberg (*Grundwahrheiten*, 115 ff.), 'The eternal power of love filled the human soul of Jesus so as to become its content. That is the Divinity of Christ.' 'The Will of God which directs the history of mankind to their salvation, in Jesus entered into history, becoming man in Him and working in His words and deeds under human historical conditions.' 'God was active in Jesus, so shall all the thoughts and impulses in His soul, what He did and what He willed, were always the affirmation and effect of the Will of God, which dwelt in Him and determined His activities.' The real Divinity is affirmed on these grounds; the true Humanity is accepted as axiomatic. The doctrine of the two distinct natures and one Person is rejected in form, though it is maintained that the *thing itself* to which it sought to give expression, is firmly held. Seeberg is no heretic. He is unquestionably orthodox *in intention*. But has he made good his right to occupy the theocentric position at all? We can scarcely expect a discussion of fundamental principles in popular lectures, like his, or in an extended programme like Beth's or Grützmacher's. Surely, however, it is a pity that so often they leave us just where the difficulties begin, or give us the benefit of their guidance just when they are over. I must confess that so far as I can see, in this doctrine of Christ's Person, we have nothing more than a transference *per saltum* of what is substantially the Ritschlian position into the theocentric plane. Besides, does not this view of Christ's Person always hover on the verge of Docetism?

Surely too, on their principles, the work of Christ should be discussed before His Person. We know the Person from the work, and not *vice versa*.

Subjective Christian Faith, or the content of Scripture as it authenticates itself immediately thereunto, has no adequate data for a doctrine of Christ's Person, apart from His work.

We now take up individual points. The Virgin

Birth is affirmed, and defended especially by Grützmacher both on historical and on *a priori* grounds, with the emphasis on the latter. But no new arguments are adduced, and it cannot be proved that the Personal Will of God can unite itself in the manner postulated, *only* with One so born. Such reasoning cannot do more than confirm the faith of those who already accept the Virgin Birth on other grounds. It should, however, be at the same time a warning to the other side against over-confident dogmatism, especially when they remember that the historic faith of the Christian Church on this point has the independent corroboration of a theologian so great and untrammelled by tradition as Rothe. Miracles are defended on principles with which we are already familiar from the writings of such British theologians as Dr. A. B. Bruce and Principal Fairbairn—their congruity with Christ's Person. Stress is laid upon the Resurrection as God's vindication of Jesus. Seeberg has devoted a special essay to 'The Gospel of the Forty Days,' referring a considerable amount of definite dogmatic teaching to the period between the Resurrection and the Ascension in a way not common in recent Protestant theology. But the most vital interest of the school, and that most closely related to their fundamental principles, is Christ's continued influence as an actual Personal Power. Can Seeberg speak, however, either of Pre-Existence or of Post-Existence except in the sense that the Will of God exists eternally? When we pray to Christ, we pray to the Will of God in Him, he tells us. The Three Persons of the Trinity, in his view of them, denote three coincident determinations of God, 'the spiritual Personality or rational effective Will,' the one having reference to the world, the other to the redemption of the race, or the Church, and the third to the redemption of individual souls. These three, we are told, exist eternally in the Eternal God, alongside of and along with each other, being realized together.

Seeberg's view of the work of Christ is modern. It starts from what we experience as Christ's work for us. But it is no longer the distinctive property of any school. Hofmann introduced it into 'Positive' circles over half a century ago. But the kernel of the Anselmic position is that it is theocentric, like the ancient theology in general, and if we can have a theocentric Christology, why not a theocentric doctrine of the Atonement?