

CHAPTER VI

BIBLICAL ECLECTICISM

THE above title may serve to describe the theoretic basis of a number of doctrinal systems which have enriched the theological literature of the modern Lutheran Church. They are biblical in respect that they heartily accept the Protestant principle that the Bible is the supreme rule of faith and practice; and they are eclectic in respect that they consciously and deliberately select some portion of the Scriptural content as constituting the assured content of revelation, in the light of which the rest of Scripture is to be valued, and by which the ecclesiastical developments of doctrine are to be tested and controlled.

This general conception is of course widely diffused throughout modern theology, and forms a link between schools which are widely separated by still more fundamental principles. Professor Flint expresses the general modern verdict when he censures the older theology for 'labouring to shut men up to receive Christianity, along with whatever is in the Bible, in the slump, as it were, because in the Bible and guaranteed to have come from God by the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Bible.'¹ It may, however, be convenient to restrict the designation to those systems which, emphatically repudiating the principle of a rationalistic or a confessional theology, or of a purely subjective

¹ *Agnosticism*, p. 491. For a valuable study of the genesis, expansion and limits of certitude as to the Word of God, see Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 1895, ch. ix. See also Ritchie, *op. cit.*, ch. ii.

theology, profess a heartfelt loyalty to the Christian revelation and its Scriptural record, and only differ to some extent in their conception of the norm which emerges from Scripture.

As a subdivision of this class we might distinguish first a group of systems which, utilising the older conception of a material principle of theology, have fastened upon some cardinal doctrine as the core of revelation. The central organising principle has been sought, as by Kahnis, in a modified doctrine of the Trinity.¹ The doctrine of the person and work of Christ has also been laid at the foundation, and shown to interpenetrate as well as to sustain the whole. An important contribution in this field is the doctrinal system of Kähler,² who falls back on the doctrine of Justification by faith, and with some reason contends that this doctrine contains, implicitly or explicitly, sufficient material for a theological system as well as for the spiritual needs of man. We shall, however, confine our attention to the two types of theory which have most deeply influenced the Church in its teaching and preaching—the first the theory of the Ritschlian school, and the second the attempt to establish an intra-scriptural norm by the assertion of the exclusive authority of the teaching of Jesus.

I

The revival of dogmatic theology in Germany in the latter half of the nineteenth century was largely due to Albrecht Ritsehl, whose work acted equally as a stimulus and a challenge. It is true that the Ritschlian school can no longer be appreciated or criticised as a unity. During the last ten years of Ritsehl's life

¹ *Lutherische Dogmatik*, 1861.

² *Die Wissenschaft der Christlichen Lehre*, 1883.

differences of opinion emerged among his followers in regard to the substance of Christian doctrine, while since his death not a few theologians who are called by his name have abandoned or modified some of his most distinctive positions as regards the basis and the relations of doctrine.¹ At the same time there are certain leading ideas of Ritschl as to the nature and proof of Christian knowledge which are not only held by professed disciples, but which continue to influence, whether consciously or unconsciously, much of the theological thinking of the modern mind.

I

Ritschl has nowhere handled the topic of the source and norm of doctrine in an exhaustive fashion. He declared it more useful to employ a sound method, and to commend it by its results, than to attempt an elaborate description and justification of its procedure. 'The prolegomena to Dogmatics,' he says, 'always reminds me of such processes as the mixing of colours, the spinning of thread, the raising of the curtain and so forth, and I find it more attractive to get to the actual business.' 'Those,' he writes again, 'who keep up a dance round the questions of the seat of religion, revelation, and the rest, linger in the court of the Gentiles, and hold themselves aloof from the vision of God.'² The fullest account of his attitude to Scripture is given in the introduction to the second volume of *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*. Particular points of importance, such as the relations of theology and philosophy, received fuller

¹ Eeke, *Die Theologische Schule A. Ritschl's*, 1897.

² O. Ritschl, *Das Leben A. Ritschl's*, Bd. II. pp. 106, 334.

treatment in the introduction to the third volume of his great monograph and in occasional essays.¹

1. Ritschl occupies in principle the Protestant standpoint as to the norm of doctrine by asserting the authority of the objective revelation of God in Christ as recorded and attested in the Scriptures. In opposition to Rationalism, he held with Schleiermacher that theology is a positive science whose data are historically given, and that it is to be protected against the attempted usurpations of speculative reasoning. He agreed that the rights of theology can only be safeguarded by a severe delimitation of the provinces of theology and metaphysics. He also held with his predecessor that Christian doctrine can only be cultivated by a thinker who takes up his position as a member of the Church, and who recognises that the primary function of the theologian is to serve the Church.² On the other hand he rejected the view that the materials of theology are to be extracted from the devout feelings or the Christian consciousness. The subjective factor has indeed an important part to play in his system, but it is not as the repository of the facts and doctrines which theology has to unfold and interpret. The source is a definite historical datum,—a revelation which had Christ for its centre and goal. 'The perfect apprehension and management of Christianity,' he says, 'is dependent on the condition that we recognise in the person of its founder the key to our interpretation of existence, the standard for the range and form of our moral tasks and our attitude to the world, and also the standard by which to test the justification and the validity of worship and prayer.'

¹ See App. I, The Principles of the Ritschlian Theology, for illustrative extracts.

² *Justification and Reconciliation*, E. Tr., iii. p. 177.

These invest with the character of a special revelation even the Christian religion with its universal destination.' Furthermore, the content of this revelation reaches us through the channel of the Scriptures. 'The theology,' he says expressly, 'which aims at exhibiting the authentic intellectual content of Christianity in positive scientific form, must collect it from the books of the New Testament, and from no other source.'¹ His confidence in the normative value of the New Testament record is based, not on a theory of inspiration, but on the fact that the canonical books are the original documents of Christianity, and therefore the only reliable witnesses as to its specific character. Experience shows that ideas and principles are liable to change and corruption; and our best authorities for the essential content of Christianity must be the testimony of its founder, and of the writers who stood nearest to the founder, and whom He commissioned and equipped for the apostolic work.

2. The content of revelation now, while it is described as biblical in that it is furnished by Scripture, is not identical and co-extensive with Scripture. The matter of revelation is narrower than the range of narrative and instruction in the sacred books in which the writers recorded it, reflected on it, and related it to contemporary thought. It is, in brief, a central content of Scripture which is apprehended by living faith.² It is a verified view of divine things, in particular of the nature and conditions of salvation, which faith—as the counterpart of

¹ *Justification and Reconciliation*, E. Tr., iii. pp. 2, 3.

² 'Scripture is regarded, not as a law—a rigid external code imposed from without on the Christian mind—but rather as a great confession of faith which we discover experimentally to be capable of awakening in us a spontaneous echo of its message of Christ Jesus the Lord.'—H. R. Mackintosh, *Expositor*, 1906, i. p. 400.

revelation and in a sense its sponsor—fastens upon in the Scriptures. It might appear, indeed, that there is matter in Scripture, supported by religious authority, which is taken over without scrutiny because of its credentials. ‘Unquestionably,’ he says, ‘that must be regarded as normative which can be shown to be the intellectual common-good of the New Testament.’ But this is not to be construed as a repentant reliance on a purely external authority. For the doctrinal matter in question is also authenticated by faith, and in this case it was additionally vouched for by the faith of the spokesmen of the primitive Church, who cannot be supposed to have erred in essential matters on which they delivered a unanimous testimony. It is otherwise in regard to doctrinal utterances which are not supported by a consensus of the primitive documents. Whether these are or are not to be taken over is a question that depends, as in the case of the Pauline doctrine of Justification by faith, on the intrinsic value of the contribution, and affords matter for argument. Within the New Testament there is a non-authoritative stratum which is ruled out on the ground that it is due to the intrusion of the rabbinical and apocalyptic thought of later Judaism. The result of the process is gathered up in a definition of Christianity, which sets the authentic elements of the original message in their proper place and perspective, and also enables us to dispose of the supplementary matter which may be irrelevant or even foreign to the purpose of revelation.¹

¹ In stating what he has not found in Protestantism, Martineau accurately describes what he might have found in Ritschl. ‘We are not permitted to take our sacred literature as it is, to let what is divine in it find us out, while the rest says nothing to us and lies dead; all such selection by internal affinity is denied to us as a self-willed unbelief, a subjection, not of ourselves to Scripture, but of Scripture to ourselves.’—*Seat of Authority in Religion*, p. 175.

3. To complete the account of the Ritschlian theory of Christian knowledge, it has to be observed that the content of revelation, after being apprehended in the records by the insight and tact of personal faith, undergoes a process of editing with a view to its translation into the forms of scientific theology. This of course involves as a necessary part of the process that in Dogmatics Christian truth is so expounded as to bring out its implications, and to relate it to later problems of thought and life which lay outside the purview of primitive Christianity. 'A systematic reproduction of biblical theology,' says Ritschl, 'which should be indifferent, not only to ecclesiastical doctrine, but towards the whole of church history, is an inadequate substitute for dogmatic theology.' But much more than this is implied in the Ritschlian process of editing biblical doctrine. The statement has been made, but needs considerable qualification, that for Ritschl 'the task of Dogmatics is to reproduce the utterances of Christ and His Apostles.' The data of the records of revelation have to be manipulated in the light of a theory of knowledge in general, and in particular of a theory of the nature of religious knowledge. They have also to be handled with due regard to the special nature of revelation.

(α) It has been said that Ritschl is in agreement with Schleiermacher in repudiating the claim of philosophy to dictate to Christian faith, and even in disallowing its claim to intermeddle in matters of faith. But this only refers to the ontological speculations and negations of metaphysics. It was held by Ritschl that there is one obligation under which theology must continue to lie to philosophy. It cannot do its work without a theory of knowledge, and it must therefore

at least borrow an epistemology.¹ He distinguishes three types of epistemological theory which have been adapted, or are adaptable, to the purposes of theology. In former times theologians either operated with the unconsidered ideas of the plain man, or they adopted the Platonic conception of the nature of ultimate realities. In both cases they thought of things—from finite objects upward to the Infinite Spirit—as substances which had an existence independently of their attributes or qualities; and which could be known in this their essential being. The second stage was initiated by the critical work of Kant, who demonstrated that all which passes for knowledge is a subjectively conditioned manipulation and arrangement of the data of experience, and that it is impossible for the mind to escape from this phenomenal world and to rise to a knowledge of things in themselves. These last remain inaccessible to us, and along with them God—although we are compelled and entitled to re-claim by faith the idea of God which was lost to reason. With the general strain of Kant's thinking Ritschl was in sympathy, but he welcomed Lotze's modification of the Kantian position which toned down its agnosticism. For the formula that we know only phenomena and not things in themselves, Lotze substituted the proposition that while we are ignorant of things in themselves we know not merely appearances but the things in the appearances. Ritschl describes and accepts his theory in the form that we 'cognise the thing as the cause of its qualities operating upon us, as the end which they serve as means, as the law of their constant changes.'² The influence of this theory

¹ *Theologie und Metaphysik*, 1881.

² *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. pp. 19, 20. It should be added that Stähelin makes it doubtful whether Ritschl understood Lotze, and did not get involved in self-contradiction. *Kant, Lotze, and Ritschl*, E. Tr., 1889, p. 166 ff.

upon the details of Ritschl's doctrinal system was far-reaching. Theology has made many confident affirmations about things in themselves, as they exist out of direct relation to human experience; and according to Ritschl all such statements are discredited as concerned with a region that lies beyond our control. We can have no knowledge of absolute attributes of God as distinguished from those which are manifested in relation to the world, none of an essential Trinity, and of the relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the immanent sphere of the divine existence. Theology must also be warned off the region occupied by objective theories of the Atonement; and may also feel some misgiving as to whether it has any title to speak of justification, in the sense of the Reformers, as a judgment pronounced within the mind of God.

(b) Besides making use of a general theory of knowledge, theology has to pay regard to the special character of religious knowledge. Its peculiarity is described by saying that it consists, not of theoretical judgments, but of judgments of value. 'The former,' says Kaftan, 'state a fact, that this or that is or has occurred. In judgments of value, on the other hand, we appreciate some thing in respect of its worth for man, or in relation to an ideal which is presupposed as valid.'¹ In its possession of this character religious knowledge is akin to ethical and æsthetic judgments and is contrasted with scientific knowledge.

'The aim is not,' says Ritsehl, 'as in science, to gain a disinterested theoretical knowledge of the objects of

¹ *Doctrinik*, 1897, p. 28. Professor Mackintosh gives the following illustration:—"Jesus Christ died upon the Cross" is a judgment of fact only; "We have redemption through His Blood" is a judgment of value or of personal conviction. It expresses what we find in the fact, the attitude we take up towards it, our appreciation of it as bearing upon our personal life.—*Expositor*, 1906, i. p. 406.

faith. What everything turns on is the personal conviction that God, Christ, the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the Church, and all other religious magnitudes of Christendom, are present and operative for us with a view to accomplishing the end of our salvation.'¹

(c) The conception of the nature of religious knowledge which has been defined governs the Ritschlian doctrine of revelation, and may be further illustrated by reference to this important subject. It was strongly emphasised by Ritschl that we misconceive the nature of revelation if we suppose that it involved the supernatural communication of knowledge of the theoretical kind. It consisted essentially of a declaration of the will of God to the end of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world, and to the realisation of blessings of salvation and human brotherhood. 'Revelation,' says Kaftan, 'cannot consist in a communication of doctrine.' 'The primary fact of revelation is that men are reconciled to God and accept the invitation to become members of His Kingdom, and out of these experiences there springs a knowledge of the being and of the will of God.'²

II

The somewhat elaborate process thus sketched has naturally invited criticism at more than one stage.

1. It is somewhat surprising that a system which energetically affirms the independence of theology should incorporate a philosophical theory which is held to oblige it to carry out a drastic programme of doctrinal revision. The theory of knowledge seems to threaten

¹ *Op. cit.*, see especially ch. iv., 'The Doctrine of God.'

² *Dogmatik*, p. 41.

the loss of much of the wealth that had been won by the instinct, and defended by the courage, of personal faith. It cannot be pleaded that the theory in question is an assured result of philosophical thought. It cannot even be shown that its essential idea necessarily involves the limitation of knowledge for which it is made responsible. It represents a great advance upon the purely empirical theory of knowledge. To say that we know appearance but not reality is less convincing than to say that in knowing appearance we also know reality in the appearance. The theory is correct in so far as it maintains that we can have no knowledge of that which is not presented in some way to our experience, and also in so far as it maintains that phenomena are an indubitable aspect and manifestation of reality. But it is quite conceivable that a knowledge which begins with reality as manifested in phenomena may advance to the possession of a larger and richer knowledge of the reality. Our knowledge of our fellow-men is given in scattered impressions received in intercourse with them, but we have good grounds for supposing that we rise from these to a trustworthy judgment as to the staple of their personality. In the moral judgments, in particular, which we pass upon them, we suppose that we reach an ethical self which is a richer and more definite entity than is given in the fragmentary self-disclosures that are made from the same personal centre in relation to ourselves. And similarly it would seem to be a perfectly tenable position that, while God is known to us only because He comes into certain relations to us, the manifestations in those relations are such as to justify further statements as to the being and attributes of God. Again, given a starting-point in experience, it is not out of the question to

suppose, as was formerly held by all theologians, that it is possible by the aid of testimony to rise to the apprehension of truths which lie outside of immediate experience. We can make affirmations about Christ, it is admitted, so far as He comes into relation with believers by faith; but if one fact of which they have assurance is His trustworthiness, and if it can be shown that He affirmed His own pre-existence, it is not clear that they should be compelled to disbelieve Him, or declare the fact unimportant, on the ground that the affirmation transgresses against an empirical theory of knowledge by concerning itself with a mode of existence which is not directly related to ourselves.

2. The Ritschlian doctrine that religious knowledge is made up of judgments of value, involves two propositions which it is desirable to disentangle and to examine separately. One proposition relates to the special character of religious knowledge, the other to the ground on which it is accepted as real or valid knowledge.

(a) The first assertion is that the parts of religious knowledge have essentially a practical bearing. They are concerned with deliverance from evil and with the positive benefits which are the object of our religious hopes—especially with the relations of God to the world and to man which are the ground of our hope of protection and blessing. We may describe the range of this knowledge, in the homiletical equivalent of an earlier generation, by saying that it has the character of saving knowledge. And this observation is substantially true of the revealed content of the Christian religion. Theology has not been restrained, and has quite properly refused to be restrained, by what may be called a utilitarian interest. It is animated by the scientific interest to which knowledge is a good, inde-

pendently of considerations of utility; and it has pursued investigations and speculations which seek no other end than the satisfaction of the intellectual instinct which seeks to know all that may be known. Further, it cannot be admitted that the work done by religious thinking in a purely theoretical interest has been fruitless: something has been collected by theology in the way of reasoning upon the data of revelation, and much has been discovered of the purposes and methods of God from the observation of His works of Creation and Providence. On the other hand it seems to be true that the deposit of knowledge which we are justified in describing as revealed truth was limited by the requirements of a practical task. The Christian religion was planted in the world as the instrument for accomplishing a racial and individual salvation; and it would seem that the intellectual illumination which accompanied it was restricted to the measure which was necessary to make clear the nature of the Christian religion, and to make effective its saving provisions. It did not fall within its scope to make such a provision as theology would have welcomed for the full satisfaction of its intellectual curiosity, and for filling up irritating blanks in a scheme of religious philosophy.

(b) The second part of the doctrine of value-judgments is that religious knowledge rests upon a different basis from theoretical or scientific knowledge. This raises a new point, as may be seen from the analogous case of medicine. Medical knowledge has an essentially practical bearing—it is a sum of healing knowledge—and yet it is knowledge which possesses scientific quality. It might equally be true that the knowledge possessed in Christianity was essentially saving knowledge, and that

at the same time the claim could be made good that it did not differ from scientific knowledge in origin, but only differed in respect of its practical application. The ground on which the contrast is affirmed is that the judgments of fact in which the former consists rest upon observation and reasoning, and are demonstrable to man regarded as a rational being; while religious knowledge is only attainable by those who bring to it a certain receptivity and will to believe—which dispositions in fact form a large part of the evidence which gives to it its credibility. Upon this it may be observed that the contrast between the foundations of the two kinds of knowledge is not so radical as is alleged. The conception of scientific knowledge as purely disinterested is subject to some qualification; as it appears that the human mind, in its quest and organisation of knowledge, has brought a selective activity to bear upon the manifold data of the world, and has set its own stamp upon particular aspects of existence which make an appeal to it.¹ On the other hand it is not evident that one might not investigate religious phenomena in a purely detached spirit, arrive at the conviction that the religious and in particular the Christian view of the world is true, and yet refuse to make it in any way a personal concern. In all ages of the Church there have been many persons who have held the Christian system on purely intellectual grounds, and in their case it seems as impossible to deny that they have some real knowledge of God and of divine things, as to affirm that such knowledge rests upon a judgment of its worth for themselves. It also seems unreasonable to say that the great multitude of persons in all ages who

¹ Ritschl saw on thinking the matter out that no knowledge is disinterested, and according to the degree of interest evoked he distinguished between concomitant and independent value-judgments.

have received the Christian religion on the ground of authority or custom, and not because of a judgment formed by them of its value for themselves, are to be held to have had no knowledge of religious truth. At the same time it is undoubtedly a fact, when we penetrate to the foundation of the knowledge of those who, because they live by the religion, are of real account in this matter, that its truths are supported by a body of evidence which differs somewhat in quality and balance from that by which scientific truths are established. The evidence adduced has less of the character of a demonstration for the intellect, but this is compensated for—and the same applies to judgments about morality and beauty—by the greater emphasis of the welcome which is given to the message for its own sake out of the depths of the sympathetic personality.

(e) The Ritschlian doctrine of revelation, though often stated in an extreme and untenable form, is founded on a just observation. The school is extremely chary of admitting that revelation could contain an element of supernatural instruction. It brought no doctrine into the world, according to Kaftan, only an invitation to enter the Kingdom. But it is difficult to see how this invitation was intelligible, or could possibly be accepted, except on the basis of instruction about God and the nature of His Kingdom. There is a curious prejudice in the view of the relation of God and man which heartily recognises the influence of His Spirit upon the will, but regards with repugnance the idea that it should ever have illuminated and enriched the intellect. The sound observation on which the Ritschlian conception rests is that revelation is not to be treated as co-extensive with Scripture; but the limitation of the scope of revelation may not be justly carried beyond

the point already adverted to in describing it as the vehicle of a gift of saving knowledge.

The theoretical apparatus of the Ritschlian school is weighted with a number of assumptions which carry into the detailed results of the system an element of dubiety. At the same time it seems that Ritschl correctly divined the general conditions under which Protestant theology has to do its work, and that he greatly contributed to further it both by the statement of problems and by the application of his method. He is right in holding that the starting-point in theology is the revelation of God in Christ, attested in the Scriptures, and also in holding that the appropriation and interpretation of the divine content demands an activity of faith which, while nursed in the Church, is not in bondage to the statutes of the Church. The question may indeed be raised whether the faith operative in the theologians of the school has been a normal and representative Christian faith. Though the exhaustive and brilliant monographs which the school has produced on the history of doctrine amply evidence the catholicity of its doctrinal interests, there is reason to think—at least in Ritschl's case—that the power of religious sympathy and insight has not been commensurate with the learning. It remains probable that there have been other periods in the history of the Church when faith has operated with a clearer vision and with a surer tact than it showed in the closing decades of a century somewhat bewildered by its own achievements. At the same time it is an incontestable gain to the Church that a system of theology has been set in circulation which, deeply rooted in personal faith, consists of what is wholly believed, includes nothing on the mere ground that it seems to be a duty to try and

believe it, and appeals to experience as standing sponsor for the doctrines which it proclaims.

II

In recent times one of the popular watchwords in popular theology has been 'back to Christ.' The watchword is somewhat ambiguous, but the meaning which it commonly bears is that all which Christ taught is authoritative, and that no other teacher is authoritative except in so far as anticipated or corroborated by Christ. We are invited to pass by the dogmatic decrees of the Catholic Church, and even the writings of Apostles and apostolic men collected in our Canon, and to take our stand upon the teaching of Jesus Himself as the supreme and sufficient guide. This view, there is reason to believe, is the working hypothesis of a considerable body of preachers who have been troubled by a feeling of insecurity consequent upon the work of biblical criticism, and who may also have shared in the declining sympathy with the confessional matter that was so largely derived in form and substance from St. Paul. It was fostered by the attractive writings of Professor Bruce, who did much to commend to perplexed minds the simplicity that is in Christ and in the Galilean Gospel. In his *Wesen des Christentums*, Harnack sets aside the view that the teaching of Jesus is the exclusive Christian norm, but the main point of the book is that the Church has mingled much foreign matter with His original Gospel.¹

The appeal to the teaching of Jesus as the supreme

¹ Of special importance is the attempt to expound and to defend this principle which has been recently made by Wendt in his *System der Christlichen Lehre*, 2 Bde., 1906-7. As a corrective of the one-sidedness see Forrest, *The Authority of Christ*, 1906. *The Christ of History and Experience*, 1901.

norm and adequate source of Christian doctrine has much to commend it. The modern Protestant theory, in the hands of the chief schools, has grown somewhat complicated—requiring many explanations and reservations; and it may not unreasonably be supposed that the sound method is more intelligible and workable. And such a method seems to be supplied in the conception that the business of theology is nothing else than to learn of Christ.

1. The arguments adduced in support of the view of the exclusively normative character of the teaching of Jesus are in the main two—that it follows from His historical and from His religious position. In the first place Christ was the founder of the Christian Church, and of its distinctive outlook upon God and the world; and it is therefore right and proper to treat His teaching as regulative of Christian faith. It is also in accordance with analogy. If the teaching of Plato be the criterion of Platonism, as would be universally admitted, it seems equally obvious that the teaching of Jesus must be the criterion of Christian doctrine. Further, it is pointed out that there is a large body of evidence that the New Testament writers regarded the teaching of Jesus as the culminating Word of God, which possessed paramount authority, and which was the source of the knowledge with which they themselves were entrusted. Many have also emphasised the argument that the unique religious position of Jesus as an object of faith carries with it the guarantee of the paramount authority of His teaching.¹

The weight of those considerations it is unnecessary, and indeed impossible, to deny. It is certain that no system of thought would be entitled to be described as

¹ Wendt, *System der Christlichen Lehre*, Bd. 1.

Christian, or as a legitimate interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ, which was in contradiction to the principles of the religious and ethical teaching of Jesus. It is also evident that the New Testament writers recognised that they were dependent on Jesus, and that they regarded His teaching as a standard with which it was unthinkable that they should disagree. But to prove that the teaching of Jesus cannot be contradicted by thinking which calls itself Christian, does not preclude the possibility that it may have been enriched by a fuller interpretation than is given in His own words of the nature, the presuppositions and the provisions of the religion of which He was the founder and mediator.

2. (a) Coming to the details of the theory we may observe, in the first place, that as expounded by the modern theologian, it has not the merit of simplicity and workableness which has largely commended it to the popular theological mind. The method is not that of appeal to a mere *ipse dixit*. The teaching of Jesus, to which normative authority is ascribed, is found to be a central doctrine which requires to be detached from other elements that combined to form its temporary setting. This message was His Gospel, which was concerned with the advent of the Kingdom of God, the great salvation therein offered, and the conditions of membership in the Kingdom. In His intellectual equipment, on the other hand, there were elements borrowed from contemporary culture which are not supported by His authority as intelligently conceived—such as His ideas about the realm of nature, the physical constitution of man, demoniacal possession, and also His outlook upon history, and the political and economic arrangements of the world.¹ The difficulty

¹ Wendt, *ibid.*, p. 57.

accordingly still remains of extracting from the mass of our Lord's teaching the religious norm which it contains, and of determining its precise scope and content.

(b) The method of this school encounters another serious problem in the fact that there is a difficulty in drawing a line between the teaching of Jesus and that of His Apostles. If it be resolved to use the Synoptic record, as the one source of our Lord's teaching, the matter is tolerably simple. For although that record consists of a report of the sayings of Christ which had passed through the hands of the Church, the argument of Wendt is irresistible that the whole has a character of originality and of unity which leave us assured that we are dealing with a scheme of thought which bears the impress of the single mind of Christ.¹ The real difficulty is whether the Fourth Gospel may be drawn upon for materials. It is evident, as is perhaps indicated by the author himself, that the teaching of Jesus had received some colour and impress from the mind through which it was transmitted; and in using the discourses of Jesus therein recorded as the norm we are therefore dependent on some combination of the original message with elements of apostolic reflection.²

(c) It is an objection to the procedure of treating the teaching of Jesus as the exclusive source of Christian knowledge that it is restricted in its range, and only touches slightly on certain important matters which are an integral part of the revelation. In the nature of the case it was an incomplete record and interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ. That revelation included the self-sacrificing death of Christ and His resurrection from the dead; and while the reports of our Lord's teaching include predictive references to

¹ *Inhalt der Lehre Jesu*, 1890.

² John xiv. 26.

these events, it obviously lay outside of His purpose to make clear their full significance. 'What gives to the testimony of the immediate witnesses its special and independent importance,' says Kaftan, 'was not only the self-witness of Jesus which it transmitted, but the circumstance that the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ was only completed in His death and resurrection. It was these facts which first led to a complete understanding of His person, which furnished the knowledge of His work as a whole, and which were the occasion of the outpouring of the Spirit in the Church. For this reason, and for this reason above all, the preaching of the first witnesses of the crucified and risen Christ is a necessary and indispensable element in the historical revelation of God.'¹ In the life of the primitive Church it might be seen that the all-important fact of experience was communion with the glorified Lord; but it was not a subject to which prominence could naturally be given by our Lord in the discourses of His earthly ministry. It was after the event that these facts claimed a place in the foreground of Christian thinking, and that the effort was made to grasp their significance more fully than could be done on the basis of any anticipatory words of our Lord. The apostolic writings put us in a position to understand the Christian revelation, not only from the point of view of the divine intention, but also from the standpoint of the earliest results. The Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus was an instrument intended to do a particular work in the souls of sinful men. The apostolic writings of the New Testament proceeded from men in whom it had accomplished the divine purpose, and who therefore wrote in full view, not only of the estate of sin and

¹ *Dogmatik*, p. 39.

misery in which the Gospel found them, but also of the way in which it had won entrance into their minds, and of the nature of the power that worked in them unto salvation.¹

3. A yet more decisive consideration is that it is impossible to differentiate, in point of quality and value, between the teaching of Jesus and the general body of apostolic teaching. It is true that all the books of the New Testament canon do not rank as equal in originality and in importance. Some are decidedly secondary and dependent, in relation either to the Synoptic teaching of Jesus, or to the Pauline theology. Nor, again, need it be denied that there are trains of thought in the apostolic writings which are pursued under the influence of Rabbinical culture rather than in the power of the inspiration of the Gospel. But when we have regard to these writings as a whole, and to their essential content, it cannot be doubted that they have their source in the same Spirit with which Christ was anointed above measure, any more that they contribute to a completer view of the contents and grounds of the Christian salvation. The proof is that the witness of the Holy Spirit can be cited no less confidently for a divine content of the apostolic writings than for the discourses of the Synoptic record. In particular, it is an undeniable fact of history that the power of the Christian religion has in no small degree been exerted through the Gospel of Christ as it was expounded in the Pauline Epistles, and as there more fully developed in its relations to the facts of human nature and to conflicting types of religious thought.

It seems probable that the modern mind, in so far as it has adopted the theory under discussion, has mis-

¹ Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, iii. Introd.

taken the apologetic value of the teaching of Jesus for doctrinal finality. It has been observed, and rightly, that there is no type of New Testament teaching which makes the same appeal to the average human nature of modern times, and also to those whose minds are burdened by disturbing elements of modern culture, as the strain of simple religious teaching, combined with a pure and lofty morality, which is set forth in the Synoptic record of our Lord's discourses. There is a universality in the appeal of Jesus—speaking as it does to man as man, and not presupposing any very definite type of previous equipment or experience, which cannot be so readily affirmed of the Gospel as presented by St. Paul. To this is to be added that the message of Jesus was conveyed in a literary form that has an undying charm in comparison with the more abstract terminology which was framed by St. Paul, and which was taken over by the Protestant tradition for theological instruction. This may be true, and yet it may also be true that when our generation has hearkened to Jesus as He spake in the days of His flesh, He says to them as before: 'It is expedient for you that I go away,'¹ and that for a fuller knowledge of what He is, and of what He wrought, He entrusts them to the school of the apostles to whom He promised the Spirit to lead them into all the truth.

It is unquestionable that what Christianity possesses in distinction from other religions and from systems of speculative theism was comprehended in Christ. In Him we possess the self-disclosure of God which forms the distinctive element in the Christian idea of God, and also the manifestation of the ideal of human perfection on the ethical side; while from Him has flowed

¹ John xvi. 7.

the influence which has enabled men to trust in the Father, and which has moulded them after His own loving image. But the revelation of divine and human love of which Christ was the medium was a revelation in life and love and saving act, as well as in word. It may even be said that the person, the life and the death were the greater and richer part of the revelation; and that their significance was greater than was expressed in His spoken words. It has been pointed out as characteristic of the religion which He founded that it imposes much responsibility on His followers in the way of utilising the talents which are committed to their trust; and it is only another illustration of this that much was left to the immediate disciples in the interpretation of the revelation of which He was the mediator, and in a sense the sum. In any case we are fully justified by a principle already emphasised in attaching the utmost value to the apostolic interpretation of the revelation of God in Christ. We are thrown back on the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit for the authentication of revelation and for insight into its essential features; and apart from any theory of inspiration the apostles and their fellow-workers of the primitive period may be trusted as the best equipped of all who, in dependence on the Spirit, have essayed to expound the significance of the revelation of God in Christ.