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REFORMED THEOLOGY AS A GUARDIAN OF THE PURE GOSPEL¹

It is possible that some will take offence at the title chosen for this lecture. Had it been chosen in a Pharisaic spirit—"God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are"; or were it to be treated in a self-satisfied manner, we should justly incur a prophetic rebuke from our friend Karl Barth, nor could we complain if he hurled at us Cicero's sharp taunt, "*Quousque tandem, Catilina!*"

But anyone who really appreciates the meaning of the epithet "Reformed" cannot speak otherwise than with great modesty on the subject of Reformed Theology. When the Reformed Students' Union met in their new premises in Halle in 1912, Friedrich Loofs, in the name of the Faculty of Theology, gave a cordial address to the students, in which he declared "that since the time of Schleiermacher there has not been in any real sense a Lutheran and a Reformed Theology in Germany: apart from a few atavisms, German scientific Theology has for decades been so 'evangelical' that the old garments no longer fit it." I entirely agree with these statements, for the really theological element in theology is Dogmatics, the knowledge of Christian truth. But how can anyone make the scientific knowledge of truth dependent on historical contingencies? That it has actually been coloured by various views which theologians have inherited from the special teaching of their own churches, goes without saying. But if I were to base my own dogmatic theology on these particular aspects of truth, I should neither be acting in the true scientific spirit, nor should I be loyal to the spirit of the church "reformed in accordance with the Word of God" and liable to be reformed again and again as days go by.

¹ This article was, in the first instance, delivered by its distinguished author in the form of an Address, at a meeting of the Continental Group of the Presbyterian Alliance, held at Wuppertal-Elberfeld, on the 11th day of September, 1930. We owe the translation to the competent German scholar, the Rev. Alex. K. Dallas, M.A., Edinburgh.—Eds.

In his *Grundriss der Dogmatik*, Paul Althaus, my colleague in Erlangen, says: "The dogmatic teaching contained in this book follows the teaching of the Lutheran Church. . . . While our Systematic Theology bears strong traces of Luther's theology, it also contains a great deal that is derived from Calvin." Thus speaks one of the best modern Lutherans—with the praiseworthy intention of thinking and speaking tolerantly. I should certainly regard myself as a strange exponent of Reformed Theology, were I to say: "While my Systematic Theology bears strong traces of Calvin's theology, it also contains a great deal that is derived from Luther." Objectively, that might not be inaccurate, but I should regard it as a strange manner of expressing myself. From my reformed point of view, the starting point is not any human type of thought, any outstanding man, or any other product of the history of the Reformed Church, but the Bible. I therefore consider it to be quite legitimate, when an unmistakable reformed theologian like Adolf Schlatter bases his *Christliche Dogmatik* on "the profound study of the New Testament," and deliberately leaves out of account all the differences that exist within Protestantism. Even a pronounced Calvinist theologian like Charles Hodge, whose book on Dogmatics is still regarded as authoritative in North America, rightly entitled it *Systematic Theology*. On the other hand, it seems to me to be illegitimate when Eduard Böhl calls his book *Dogmatik, founded on the teaching of the Reformed Church*, and claims that it contains Bible teaching, controlled by, and in accordance with, the Confessions of the Church. Even the Dutch theologian, H. Bavinck's, book, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* stresses unduly by its title the confessional basis on which it rests.¹ "Reformed" theology is characterised by its loyalty to the Bible—a loyalty which some Protestant schools charge with a lack of the historical sense.

The subject of this lecture is forced upon our notice by the conditions in which we find ourselves. It is just because the distinguishing feature of Reformed Theology is loyalty to the complete Gospel and retains an open mind for a more profound understanding of the truth, its teaching has often been obscured,

¹ It need hardly be said that these critical remarks are not meant to belittle the works referred to. Bavinck's book is distinguished both by its comprehensiveness and by its thoughtful treatment of its subject. Some of Karl Barth's statements about "respect for the Confessional Theology" sound more rigid than the formula itself, and than the correct title of his book. But that would require a more lengthy criticism.

and some of its elements are in danger of being lost. These elements were present in special clearness and force in the Reformed Church. We must guard these against an illegitimate tendency to modernise them, and against a union to which we do not altogether object, but to which we cannot and will not sacrifice our own special testimony in so far as that testimony helps to preserve a complete and pure Gospel.

This brings us to the first point on which Reformed Theology is to be regarded as a guardian of the pure Gospel.

I. THE BIBLE. It is accepted on all hands that the formal principle of Protestantism is the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures. But this principle is asserted with special emphasis by the Reformed Church. It goes back to Zwingli and Calvin (*Institutio*, I, 6-9). But Reformed Theology does not give it this prominence because of the weight of these great names, but because it has learned by experience that the Gospel can be kept pure and free from human partiality only by the use of the whole Bible.

Such subordination to a collection of writings which came into existence and were gathered together by a historical process must not be influenced by any form of Traditionalism such as is seen at work in all human religions. It has an evangelical and Protestant basis only when we see by faith the presence of something absolute in the otherwise relative course of history. The absolute authority of Christ is the norm by which Christian Theology stands or falls. God, manifested in the flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Our souls thirst after God Himself, not after a mere doctrine about God. And God does not come to meet mystically isolated and ecstatic human souls, but gives Himself in a historical revelation of Himself, as indeed all that we really possess and all that governs our life comes to us out of history. These are the compelling thoughts that enable us to realise the absoluteness of Christ which is fixed for our faith. We cannot follow out these thoughts fully here, but they must be regarded as assumed in what follows.

According to our view, a historical revelation requires also a historical attestation and superintendence. The historical Christ, the self-revelation of God that appeared in history, cannot possibly be a figure that has hitherto remained ungrasped and has only now been disentangled by historical criticism from

an otherwise deceptive tradition. The historical Christ is the Christ of the New Testament.¹ In this historical document we either have the real Christ, or have no revelation at all, but a disguise. According to the New Testament sources, the Christ of God did not appear like a fleeting meteor, but as the Messiah of Israel, the end of a previous history of revelation, the record of which is indispensable for our understanding of Him. Thus the Bible—Old and New Testaments—had a historically graduated share in the revelation of the absoluteness of Christ.

The Bible thus becomes the historical medium of the present revelation of God. This is the meaning of Calvin's doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum* to the authority of Scripture. To be sure, the reformer, in an age that knew nothing of exact critical investigation of the literature of the Bible, did not realise all the consequences of his statement. There are problems now that did not exist for him. But the basis of his doctrine remains unshaken. It is not the results of human investigation, but only the inward witness of the Holy Spirit, that gives us the confidence that God speaks to us in the Bible. In the Christ, to whom these books bear witness, God revealed Himself for all time to men at a definite, historical period. But He also reveals Himself now and in person through the Bible. The Bible is the unsurpassable form in which the contents of the historical self-revelation of God in Christ is mediated to mankind at large and to men individually.

Thus the witness of the Bible to Christ stands supreme above all the subsequent testimonies that the Church has produced. Witness is borne by the Church of God throughout the centuries and by this witness she begets her children. There can be no loyalty to the Bible if this fact is not recognised. But this is the point at issue between Catholicism and Protestantism—the question whether Christians are to be controlled by these subordinate testimonies of the Church, or whether they are to be led on to a personal and present experience of the revelation of God in the Christ of the Bible such as will enable them, if need be, to criticise the Church and reject its merely derivative authority. It is possible, to be sure, that owing to this contrast Protestant and Catholic Christians may, up to a point at which debate about the ultimate certainties is suspended, attain a kind

¹ This simple truth has been developed by M. Kähler in his book, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus*, 1896.

of practical community of faith ; but it is not possible to draw up a systematic theology which would be both Protestant and Catholic, because it is the essential task of such a theology to get down to the basic truths. Protestant theology, however, will best perform its task if it does not bind itself even loosely beforehand to any confessional interpretation of the personal conviction gained from the Bible, but rears its structure ever afresh, even if it is not altogether independent of inherited teachings. That is the kind of loyalty to the Bible that the Reformed Church teaches. I follow it, not because it is "Reformed," but because it leads us on to appropriate the pure and complete Gospel.¹

This does not mean that we are to adopt in all respects the theoretical and practical methods of treating the Bible that were followed by our forefathers. Protestant orthodoxy, and in especial the Reformed school of it, has certainly been guilty of grave exaggerations here. It has on occasion gone so far as to profess belief in the divine and infallible inspiration of the Hebrew vowel points and in the classical purity of New Testament Greek. We must not be content to accept reluctantly the facts actually established by historical criticism and by comparative religion ; we must be ready to welcome them because they are calculated to clear away legalistic impurities from the Gospel. We come to see revelation as given in the course of actual history, although it stands out from the universal course of history as a compact entity in itself. No subsequent happening contributes any real addition to it. Later events and discoveries can only suggest interpretations which may stimulate our minds but cannot be really authoritative. In proportion as we are prepared to lay hold upon the total revelation given in the Bible, we are enabled to reproduce the contents of the Gospel in its purity and completeness from our personal faith.

2. JUSTIFICATION. The central content of the whole Bible and especially of the Gospel is Christ—not only as a teacher, and as a pattern of moral living, nor even merely as a religious genius, but as the absolute and present revelation of the grace of God. He whose heart is opened to receive this revelation—and this is done through believing faith—possesses God in person and, in Him, salvation.

¹ A fine modern example of Calvin's exegetical practice of taking the whole Bible, instead of merely emphasising favourite ideas, is found in Dr. Siegfried Goebel. See the instructive little book dedicated to him, *Zum Gedächtnis an Dr. Siegfried Goebel*, Erlangen, 1929.

This bursts the bonds of the legalism which fetters every non-evangelical religion, be it Christian or otherwise. All such religions regard it as essential that man should observe sacred traditions of worship and life, that he should submit himself morally and intellectually to an institution with its sacred services and dogmas, in order thereby to expect salvation. But in a completely purified evangelical Christianity this scheme of worship and reward is replaced by a clear, personal relationship, the father to the child, the holy and gracious God to the sinner. And this relationship cannot possibly be earned or acquired. It is the wondrous and present reality, in which the sinner meets with the Christ of God in the gracious word of the Gospel and lays hold on the confidence that God has forgiven him and will never cast him off.

That is the meaning of the forensic or juristic, not the medical or chemical, view of Justification. What lies nearest to the sinner's heart is not the attainment of new moral strength, but that he may stand before God; not that he be made righteous, but that he may be pronounced righteous. The outstanding interest is centred in religion, not in morality; on the Beyond, not on the Here; on God Himself, not on the world first, with God as a subsidiary help to our personal and social existence in it.

There is no doubt whatever that evangelical and Protestant Christianity of all shades owes to Martin Luther the clear recognition of this truth in its complete, eschatological sweep, omitting all that is intermediate and concentrating on the 'ultimate' reality. Zwingli had already endeavoured to reform religion in the light of Bible teaching, but it was only after Luther's teaching had become widely known that Zwingli also found in the Bible these peculiarly Protestant truths. Calvin, too, declared himself a disciple of Luther in this respect. "Reformed" theology must therefore not take to itself the credit of having discovered this pure Gospel. It can only claim to be one of the guardians of it. And yet, in respect of this Doctrine of Justification, it can be said that the "Reformed" teachers have been the best Lutherans. The Heidelberg Catechism (Question 60f) and the Westminster Catechisms (Questions 70ff and 33) give distinct expression to the Doctrine of Justification, whereas, as is well known, Luther's Catechism only deals with the subject generally and not dogmatically.

Here in Wuppertal I need only mention the names of the three Reformed theologians of whom we have heard today¹, Gottfried Daniel Krummacher, Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge, and Paul Geysler. The Catholic dogmatic theologian Möhler was doubtless also thinking of the movement led by Krummacher when he declared in 1832—just a century ago—that the Reformed theologians insisted even more strongly than the Lutherans on the assurance of salvation. Of course that can only be possible with a clearly forensic Doctrine of Justification—a doctrine that averts the gaze from human qualities and looks only towards God. It is also perhaps not altogether fortuitous that Karl Barth, whose special emphasis on the reality of God and of the word of His grace so quickly gained the ear of his time, is of “reformed” lineage.

There are perhaps special reasons why reformed theology has preserved in such clarity and purity Luther’s work on this subject. But before we enter upon these, there are two deductions which can be drawn from the Protestant view of Justification.

(a) Seeing that the thoughts of Paul, which were rediscovered by Luther, are directed upon the acquittal of the sinner at the Last Judgment, it is clear that it is not our main business to preach a “social Gospel,” but to bring out clearly what Calvin—in complete agreement with the real Luther—called the *meditatio futurae vitae* (*Institutio* III, 9). Christ is not a Messiah of life here, but the once crucified and now exalted King of the future, eternal Kingdom of God. The task of His messengers, therefore, is not to seek in the first place the culture of civilisation, but to aim at the conversion of men, and thus gather in the members of His Kingdom. In the interests of a pure Gospel, one of the urgent tasks of the present day is to preserve this work from the danger of being secularised.

(b) In order to judge of faith as the medium of Justification, the difference between Law and Gospel should be kept in clear view. The Law—the moral claim of God on man—retains its place in the plan of salvation, preparing the way for faith and forming a framework for it; but the Law must not be intermingled with the Justification that is by faith. As Paul says (*Gal. iii. 12*): the law is not of faith; he that doeth it shall live in it. The really great thing that Luther did was to rediscover

¹ In the brilliant lecture delivered by Pastor Klugkist Hesse on the work of these three men.

this clear Pauline contrast. Even Augustine, the great teacher of Grace, did not understand it. He remained a legalist. He regarded Grace as the efficient power, and faith as the germ of new qualities produced by it. But whenever the assurance of Justification is based on new qualities, it begins to totter. The "Liberty of a Christian Man," with all that is involved in it, is lost. Grace means to us God's free mercy, and Faith is the open eye by which we see the Sun of Grace. That the Sun of Grace does shine in Christ for the sinner, and that the sinner can see it—these are the great truths, independent of and incommensurable with all other ethical and psychological data. They mean the incursion into human life of the Absolute which is in Christ for the world.

The retention of these two points is essential to the real understanding of the Gospel. We do not pretend that Reformed Theology has always and everywhere been beyond criticism in this matter. In some Lutheran circles, indeed, the conviction is held that the Reformed teaching regarding the relation of the Gospel to the social side of life should be carefully avoided as a danger. Reformed teaching is also frequently charged with failing to distinguish clearly between Law and Gospel. Surely no one can justly bring such an accusation against Calvin. Mention has already been made of his *meditatio futurae vitae*, which some have regarded as a plea for the ascetic life. On the subject of Justification (*Institutio* III, 11) his teaching is distinctly forensic and he strongly emphasises the contrast between legal and Gospel righteousness. But he is not content to treat this as an isolated truth: he fits it into his comprehensive system of theology. It affords another example of his use of the whole Bible. In the next inferences which are drawn from the central evangelical Doctrine of Salvation, Calvin's system is true to the Pauline and Johannine teaching. It is from this lofty point of view that all sides of life are surveyed—in the light of the whole Bible, including the Old Testament. Gospel teaching unfolds its universality without losing any of its purity.

3. THE RECEPTION OF SALVATION. Here we have the first test of the purity and logical truth of evangelical teaching. Three theories are possible:

(a) The popular theory of *Synergism*. It was introduced into Protestant theology by Melancthon, and appeared in the

Reformed Church as Arminianism. As against a mechanical Determinism it seeks to guard the truth that the life of faith is entered upon by a conscious, voluntary decision and involves personal responsibility; but by following out all the logical consequences, it sets up again Law and Morality, regards "free Grace" as a mere manner of speech, and produces a needless excitement in the heart instead of a calm and yet a stimulating assurance.

(b) A deeper insight inevitably leads to the Pauline and Johannine view. Founding on Philippians ii. 13, I would call it *Energism*. "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." These words do not enunciate a psychologically Determinist doctrine. They express an unshakeable faith. Following a method that is now being called that of "existential thought," the words constitute a statement which may at times seem meaningless, but which the believer cannot but maintain, if he is to preserve his existence as a believer. However certain it be that it is I who will and believe and do, however certain it be that no abstract force can relieve me from the necessity of personal decision, it is equally certain that, as a believing man, I attribute to Divine Grace this act of mine that lays hold of justifying grace. He who is born of God believes (John i. 12f) and accepts Christ. This seems to exclude an inactive faith, for he that hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His, and only those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God (Rom. viii. 9, 14). It is not as if faith were rendered unnecessary by moral behaviour, or as if Justification were suspended or outdone by some special Sanctification. Faith, i.e. the personal relationship to God, maintains irremovably its central place. Nor does it give way before a legalistic scheme of works and reward, but it evinces itself in obedience (Rom. i. 5), and its genuineness is demonstrated by love (1 Cor. viii. 3; 1 John iii, 9, 14). "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." Evidently, the danger of attaching an improper value to works must be guarded against, and therefore the 'motive' is supplemented by the 'quietive'—it is God who works in me. Free Grace and moral obedience are, as it were, the counterpoises which maintain the spiritual life in continual progress and prevent it from ceasing to advance. It is these two elements that are summed up together in the saying of Christ, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and

they follow me, and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand" (John x. 27f).

These Pauline-Johannine ideas are cardinally involved in the Calvinistic Theology. They combine into a powerful unity profound Gospel truths which are elsewhere found as separate fragments. It is when they are thus combined that they afford a sound theoretic support for an assurance that is both calm and active. The Divine Grace, which Luther and Melancthon conceived as pardoning mercy appropriated by faith, is here seen to be the radiant sun that opens the closed eye of faith. The logical inference is here drawn, that the *donum perseverantiae* can only be assured to the believer who lives in the obedience of faith. This also explains why the doctrine of Predestination was firmly upheld. Apart from this, it is nothing but an idle speculation. Here it stands clearly forth, indissolubly conjoined with its counterpoise, the so-called *Syllogismus practicus*. As is said in Question 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the believer does good works *inter alia* "that in ourselves we may be assured of our faith by its fruits"; and according to Question 53f, by "faith" is meant the faith that the Holy Spirit "is given to me, makes me by a true faith a sharer of Christ and of all His benefits, comforts me, and will be mine for ever." In the words of the Westminster Confession XVI, 2, "By good works believers strengthen their assurance of salvation."

It is easy to criticise the separate parts of this system after violently wrenching them apart from each other. When taken together they form a splendid unity, and that not only as a system, but practically, as is seen in the words of Jesus (Matt. vii. 16): "By their fruits ye shall know them." Adolf Harnack has said wisely that every living religion includes an element of mystery. Here we have that element, at once intensely spiritual and intensely active.

To be sure, we come up against a difficulty in what seems to be the inherent inevitable Particularism of Election. It should perhaps be, and has often been, compensated for by Biblical Universalism. As far back as 1566 Bullinger's *Helvetica posterior* expounded Election by free grace apart from the thought of Reprobation. In 1903 the Presbyterian Church of the United States of North America added to the Westminster Confession explanatory remarks to the effect that Election was not to be taken as

meaning anything irreconcilable with the love of God for all men, or as discouraging missionary effort. I remember reading in a German Lutheran Church newspaper about that time, "Thank heaven, our Confessions need no revision." But it is an essential mark of Reformed Theology that it allows room for progress so long as the Biblical foundation is retained.

(c) Lutheranism has repeatedly tried to find a way out by appealing to what has been called "the objectivity of the means of grace," and it became involved in a confused mingling of Quietistic and Sacramental Mysticism and Synergism. The purity of the Gospel has to be defended against all attempts to transfer the mystery inherent in religion from the personal sphere to the outward sphere. But we do require a vigorous insistence on an objectivity that is spiritual.

4. THEOCENTRIC THEOLOGY. There can be no doubt that, if the Gospel is to unfold its full power, Subjectivism must be avoided. Sure standing ground can only be found in the objectivity of the living God and of the revelation of His Kingdom. The use of the whole Bible and a profound appreciation of the history of salvation to which it bears witness raises us above the narrowness of spiritual selfishness which only partially brings the hungry soul into touch with the objectivities of revelation. Evangelical religion, if it is not to become mere Pantheistic Mysticism without any history behind it, will always base the salvation of the believer on the revelation of God in Christ and on the word of His grace. All too frequently the soul is so occupied with itself and its salvation, that it loses the comprehensive look and all interest in the doings of God's grace and power. To do this shrivels the spiritual life.

(a) At the very heart of the life of faith must stand the living God, who desires to be held in honour for His own sake, and not only the deliverer of the soul and the supreme means of salvation. To see Him in His revelation *is* Salvation. Classical expression to this truth is given by Jesus Himself (John xvii. 3): "This is eternal life, to know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Certainly, to look at God brings blessedness, but when faith attains maturity my blessedness becomes full-grown as a kind of by-product. Even Luther, although he started from a personal need of salvation declares, this. In a note on the Doxology, which he appended to his

exposition of the Fifth Psalm, he says: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost—that is the note struck by the first commandment and by the first petition. Nothing can be dearer to our hearts than the honour of God." In Calvin, this is the theme of his entire theology. Writing to Cardinal Sadolet, he points out the incorrectness of saying that man's need of salvation can be satisfied by the hierarchical church, and maintains that man's need of salvation should not be made the starting point at all. He says, "It is neither true piety nor correct theology to direct men's attention mainly to their own salvation. It is for God and not for ourselves mainly that we are born. But in order to make the glorifying of His name more attractive to men and to stimulate their zeal for it, the Lord has so ordained it, that by seeking His glory men always best further their own salvation." Similar statements occur in the Genevan and Westminster Catechisms. E.g., "What is the chief end of human life? To know God who is the author of it. Why do you say that? Because God created us and placed us in the world that He might be glorified through us. Therefore it becomes us that we should dedicate our lives to Him from whom they come. But what is man's chief good? Just this: because, if this is taken from us, we are more wretched than the animals." These statements also imply that assurance of salvation should find expression not only in the acceptance of, but also in self-denying devotion to the revelation of God's grace, to His honour and to His Kingdom, in imitation of Christ who said (John iv. 34), "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work." The Kingdom of God is not only the Kingdom of Grace, but also of nature. The first does not disappear behind the second.

(b) Christ, as King of the Kingdom of God, is more than the means of adjusting the holiness of God to His pardoning mercy. To regard Him as the living and exalted head of His people, to Whom everything is to be subjected, is an essential part of theocentric theology. Calvin regards Christ's Lordship as both outward and inward. Through the exalted Christ God makes a twofold call—a universal and a special (*vocatio universalis et specialis*. *Instit.* III, 24, 8 and Rom. ix. 6ff; xi. 32). In virtue of the universal call, the Spirit of Christ is to control and govern the public life of nations. It is here that God's law finds its sphere. Even the Old Testament, which

exhibits a national life pervaded by divine ideas, becomes important here. It is possible that Calvin's picture of theocracy is drawn in an ultra-legalistic manner, but "Reformed" theology does not slavishly adhere to any human type. In the interests of the purity of the Gospel, a compulsory carrying out of the first table of the law must certainly be waived. The Genevans did right when, on October 27th, 1903, the 350th anniversary of the execution of Servetus, they erected a monument to his memory. And not only Theology, but Christian Governments as well, might derive helpful suggestions from the conception of a "universal calling" which would be of more benefit to national life, except in cases where it has become actually anti-Christian, than the current theory that political and economic life are laws to themselves. The term "a social gospel" is certainly an exaggeration of anything taught by Calvin and a denial of the religious basis of the Gospel: but we are bound to respect the radical measures against national burdens which were possible in North America as a kind of after-effect of the Calvinist spirit. The delegate from Wuppertal who so kindly welcomed our conference in the town hall of Elberfeld, suggested that the Elberfeld system of moral and personal oversight of the poor could be traced back to "reformed" influences. That is so. It goes back to the founder of the Free Church of Scotland, Thomas Chalmers. He declared that good order in morals and independence of spirit were well-pleasing to God even if only few of the elect were concerned. That is what is meant by the "universal calling" and it must not be neglected in favour of the "special calling" that is only concerned with the future life. Abraham Kuyper, in his splendid lectures in America on Calvinism, has shown clearly how in Calvinism all spheres of life were brought into subjection to the sovereign God, to whom alone honour is due.

The special calling through the Spirit holds good of the living members of Christ, who "in Him" are brought into the new world and gain not only assurance of justification but also the desire of obedience. The doctrine of the *insertio* or *insitio corporis Christi* (*Institutio* III, 1, 1; II, 10; Heidelberg Catechism 20; Larger Westminster Catechism 66) contains truths that are essentially Pauline and Johannine (2 Cor. v. 17, 21; John vi. 48ff; xv. 1ff), and goes far beyond the mere individualistic formula of Justification for Christ's sake.

(c) The "universal" and "special" calling must also be applied to the Church, which is not merely an institution "for the Word and the Sacraments." The widespread misinterpretation of Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession (as if the sole elements making up the Church were the Word and the Sacraments) may apply to a *congregatio* but not to a *communio sanctorum*. Christ intended the Church to be more than a gathering of individuals, each of whom is fed apart and separately by God's Word and Sacrament. To be sure, these are radii starting out from Christ as the centre, and are among the essentials of the Church. But the circumference, uniting these, is also essential. The "members" must be in organic union. The Church is the Body of Christ. The New Testament contains rules for its organisation and its discipline which cannot be neglected without penalty. To derive certain definite offices from the Bible may in some cases seem carrying legalism too far, but the functions which these offices are meant to serve are essential to the Church, and her efficiency is diminished when she lays them aside. In this regard it is the task of theology to remind her of these functions. The gap between the actual conditions of the Church and the ideal set before her should be a summons not to be content with a minimum activity but to set free the full power of the Gospel.

But even a Church activity carried on faithfully in the light of the Bible will not enable us to attain a perfect Church containing nothing but true believers. It is a misunderstanding of Calvin that represents him as looking upon the Church as a visible community of those who have been predestinated. He distinguishes quite clearly between the general call to the Church and the special call to membership in the living Body of Christ. To bring about the latter rests with God alone. But He makes use for this purpose of the services of man, and such services are blessed in proportion as they observe the Divine rules of the universal calling.

The Sacraments are seen in their true light only when they are viewed in the "fellowship of the Saints." The lack of clearness on this subject that prevails among German Protestants endangers the purity of the Gospel. It is to Luther (Sermon on Mark xvi. 16, Weimar Edition, Vol. 10, p. 141f) that we owe the conception of the Sacraments as divine seals confirming the Word. It has passed into the Heidelberg Catechism (Question

65f). It contains the most serviceable Gospel statement on the subject. The Sacraments are more than human tokens, but they are not magical charms. Wherein lies their sealing power? From the individualistic point of view this question is difficult to answer. For it is difficult to see how the merely individual application of the elements in Baptism and the Lord's Supper should have a stronger sealing effect than a powerful setting forth of the Word of Grace. But in the household of the children of God, which embraces and raises and carries the individual child, the Sacraments do gain actual sealing power, and assure the believer whose faith is weak that he does not stand apart in illusion, but has his share in the gracious acts of God to His people. It is this that strengthens both the religious and moral life of the believer. And it is here that we reach an objectivity which is a part of theocentric theology. The power resides, not in what the Church does by its human thoughts and efforts, but in what God gives to her and works in her.

5. FINITUM NON EST CAPAX INFINITI. What has just been set forth means that the personal life of faith is supported and surrounded by objective realities. But the purity of faith, of the spiritual and personal approach to God, demands a relative and constantly repeated application of the ancient "reformed" motto, *finitum non est capax infiniti*. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is the basal axiom which the Christian faith affirms, even when that axiom does not fit into the forms of current thought. But if the absolute God and His self-revelation in Christ in human form are to be laid hold of, we must keep in view the maxim just quoted, in order to avoid an unspiritual idolatry.

This holds good

(a) Of the Church. A sharp and clear distinction must be maintained between the Church Visible and the Church Invisible.

(b) Of the Bible. We refer back to what was said in Section I about the historically graduated character of the revelation contained in it.

(c) Of the Sacraments, especially in respect of the corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper. The maxim emerged in defence of the Gospel doctrine of the Sacraments when an impossible "realistic" interpretation of the words of institution was carried.

over into the Doctrine of Christ in order to maintain the *ubiquitas corporis Christi*. Orthodox Christology in its "reformed" shape is just as untenable as the Lutheran form of it. The maxim reminds us that in our spiritual fellowship with the Living Christ we must leave out all reference to the corporeal presence of Christ—both in and apart from the Supper. This is the only serviceable meaning of the statement—in itself otherwise meaningless—that the body of Christ is in Heaven. Evangelical faith learns that God's historical revelation uses the Word as a corporeal means to produce spiritual results and He looks for a spiritual corporeality yet to appear. In the meantime He regards the assumption of directly corporeal effects as a sullying of its spiritual and personal character. What some people call "reformed" Dualism and Spiritualism is an indispensable protection against a mysticism of Nature—theosophical and otherwise.

(d) Against the attempt to set up on earth the perfect kingdom of Christ. Such a tendency is natural to a secularised Calvinism which loosens the "universal calling" from its religious connections. The earthly kingdom of peace, the organisation of mankind through conduct inspired by love, which hovered before the eyes of a theorising German philosophy and theology as a regulating principle, an ideal that can only be reached by infinite approximation—this is aimed at by the practical "American" mind through agencies that are political and social in their nature.

(e) Against Perfectionism, which believes in the possibility of perfected qualities in the Christian man during his lifetime on earth.

Faith in God, who "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. iv. 5) can only be retained if it proves itself true in all directions. But if it is to be kept pure and clear, it must not allow itself to be outdone or replaced by any kind of earthly tangibility or by any goal thought of as something to be attained on earth. *Soli Deo gloria*.

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