

of the inward experience of that fellowship in a new life produced by a moral and spiritual renovation of the soul of man. Doctrines, or general principles bearing on the relation of God to man, are indeed contained in the Bible, but only as they are involved in the great realities that the Bible makes known to us. The Bible is to the theologian what the telescope is to the astronomer, or the microscope to the physiologist. Many of the laws of these sciences could not have been known without the help of these instruments.—not because the telescope discovers to us laws of astronomy, or the microscope enables us to see the principles of physiology, but because they bring within our ken the phenomena from which these laws and principles may be ascertained. So the Bible does not directly reveal dogmatic principles; but its function is to reveal to us that great work of renovation by God in Christ, from which the principles of Christian dogmatic are to be derived. On this view, while the Christian religion is ever one and the same, unalterable in all ages, Christian theology, or the scientific knowledge of that religion, is constantly progressive. All its truths are indeed contained implicitly in the Bible; but they have to be drawn from it, not by a mere process of interpreting and systematizing the words of Scripture, but by apprehending and experiencing the realities made known to us by the words, and so coming to understand what they are and in what relations they stand one to another. It is in this way that all the great doctrines in theology have been established,—not merely by the application of grammar and logic to the text of Scripture, but by the apprehension and experience of the renovating change, and the comparison and understanding of its different parts. So, for example, the doctrine of the Logos was formulated by men like Justin Martyr, who, after vainly searching for truth in all the schools of philosophy, found that there is in Christianity, when sincerely received, a light that dispels the darkness and doubt of the mind. So Augustine learned the doctrines of original sin and divine grace, by finding in his own experience the power of inward corruption on the one hand, and the deliverance wrought by the gospel on the other. So Luther discovered the truth of justification by faith, through learning by sore and bitter conflicts how impossible it was to find peace of conscience, as long as he trusted to any works of his own, and how fully he obtained it by faith in Christ. In this way the system of dogmatic has been built up, one doctrine after another being added, as it was discovered and verified by the experience of the church. None of these developments was any addition to the Christianity of true disciples of the Lord; that remains substantially the same in all ages, and contains implicitly all true doctrines of religion. But all Christians are not conscious of what is involved in their religion and experience, and some are very imperfectly aware of it. The men who have made their mark in theology have been those who have been led by circumstances, and enabled by their intellectual powers, to discern elements in Christian life not previously seen; and the body of the church, coming after them, have verified and accepted the results of their experience. In this way dogmatic theology hitherto has been progressive, and no man or church has a right to say that the goal has been reached beyond which no further progress is possible.<sup>1</sup>

There is one condition always to be borne in mind, with which alone such progress is sound and genuine. It is that what is added to the system of doctrine be really an expression of the Christianity which is revealed in Scripture. Anything that is not such may be a fancy of men.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Candlish's *Cunningham Lectures*, Lect. vi. Note A; Balny's *Cunningham Lectures*, "On the delivery and development of doctrine," Lect. v.

or an abnormal development of spiritual life, but it is not really a discovery of Christian truth. There have been opinions held and widely prevalent that are of this character, and it is part of the work of the theologian to detect and remove what is false as well as to build up what is true. There have been false developments of doctrine; there have been exaggerations and maladjustments of important truths. It is not probable that any minute and elaborate system consists of pure and absolute truths unmixed with any error. The work of progress in theology, therefore, must sometimes consist of undoing what has been laboriously built up in past ages. But if any true progress is possible now, it is not to be expected that all the old beliefs will have to be swept away, and an entirely new system put in their place. For if nothing had been ascertained in the course of the ages during which so many great minds have been directed to the study of theology, there would seem to be little hope of anything certain being discovered now. Those who think theology to be a progressive science can most consistently hold that some progress has been made already, and some conclusions have been reached that are not to be overturned by any new inquiries. They do not look for an entire reversal of old beliefs, and a new theory of the universe and its relation to God to be put in their place; they expect that what has been most generally agreed upon in former ages will be maintained and confirmed, and that any new truth that may be brought to light will fit in to the old foundations; though in some cases former modes of statement may have to be reconsidered and adjusted to larger and deeper views, and exaggerated or one-sided doctrines may have to be given up or modified. There are some doctrines in every system that are merely sectarian, adopted by one particular branch of the church, but not recognized by others as correct expressions of Christian faith and life, e.g., the Anglican dogma of baptismal regeneration, or the Lutheran tenet of the communication of attributes in the person of Christ, or the supralapsarian and sublapsarian theories of Calvinists; in regard to such points there is no just ground of confidence of their permanence; they are like plausible but unproved hypotheses in science. But there are many leading doctrines which, ever since they have been distinctly formulated, have been accepted by the great mass of Christians in all branches of the church; these may be said to be established results of theological investigation, which no further progress of the science is likely to overthrow.

The progressive character of dogmatic, and the manner of its progress in the past, may be seen from a brief sketch of its history from the end of the apostolic age to the present day. The apostolic writings themselves do not properly fall within the range of such a history, for they are not of the nature of human science but of divine revelation. No doubt several of them present to us conceptions and trains of thought that are very analogous to the systems of later times, and have sometimes been employed as the basis of dogmatic systems. But the inspired writers do not stand in the same line as the thinkers who came after them; their aim in writing was not the scientific one of investigating the principles of Christianity in their mutual relations, but the more primary religious one of presenting Christianity itself to the world. This they have been enabled to do, by the working of the Spirit in them; with a power and fulness and insight that throw much light on the scientific study of Christian doctrine; but their writings are not doctrinal systems, and do not come into the line of the rise and progress of the human science of dogmatic. Its history begins with the attempts of men to comprehend the revelation of Christianity, and presupposes that revelation complete, though not completely

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understood, as its starting point. From that point onward it may be regarded as passing through six pretty well defined periods or stages.

I. The first may be called the apologetic age, extending from the apostolic time to the death of Origen (254 A.D.), in whom it may be said to have culminated. During this period the intellect of the church was gradually awakening and coming into activity; but it was only by degrees, and in the course of several generations, that its efforts led to any properly doctrinal results. The very earliest Christian literature is simply practical and hortatory, chiefly in the form of epistles (Apostolic Fathers). From the middle of the 2d century, however, the need was felt of defending the church's faith against argumentative attacks, whether popular, literary, or philosophic. Hence the chief mental power of the Christian community was turned in the direction of "apologies," by which these attacks were repelled, and attention was directed mainly to the evidences of the truth and divinity of Christianity. This, however, indirectly led to the articulate statement of some of the most essential doctrines of Christianity, and to the beginnings of a dogmatic system. The great apologetic question was generally and rightly conceived in the form of a search for some true and reliable teaching about God and divine things; and the Johannine idea of Christ as the light of the world, the Logos or Word of God, naturally occurred to the apologists as that which most exactly met the want. Thus the doctrine of the Logos, in some at least of its aspects, was brought out. Then in the conflicts with Gnosticism, which may be said to be as really apologetic as those with Judaism and heathenism, certain aspects of Christianity were very distinctly brought into consciousness, such as the creation of all things by God, the reality of the human nature, death, and resurrection of Christ, the universality of the gospel, and the responsibility of man. The apostolic creed probably shows us how the original baptismal formula became the basis of more definite articles of faith, shaped in the light of the apologetic necessities of the age. But while there was thus an inevitable tendency towards dogmatic development and definition, there was not for long any direct interest in doctrine as such, still less in the ordering of doctrines into a system. Origen was the first in whom this impulse was strong and active, and his work *De Principiis* (*Περὶ Ἀρχῶν*) may be said to be the earliest attempt in the field of dogmatic.

II. The second great period in the history of dogmatic, extending from Origen (who died 254) to John of Damascus (who died 754), is distinguished from the first by its being occupied mainly with controversies within the church, and thus may be called the polemic age. As the gospel spread more and more throughout the world, and gained the victory over paganism in the minds and hearts of the most enlightened of the day, the defence of Christianity against external assaults gradually ceased to be the one all-engrossing duty of the church's theologians; and at the same time heresies so thoroughly and manifestly antichristian as those of the Gnostics ceased to have any prevalence among Christians, and other divergent views, of a less openly hostile nature, began to appear. As the doctrine of the Logos had been one of the first that the church was led to think out in the apologetic period, it not unnaturally became the point at which varying conceptions first came into conflict. On this, as on many other subjects, the Christian redemption is so full and many-sided that it is no wonder that its entire contents could not be grasped at once and by all minds, or that some were led to accept some aspects of it more readily than others, and to give these an exaggerated predominance. Hence the progress of Christian thought to the right understanding of

divine truth has been through a series of controversies and oscillations from one extreme to another. This process may be said to have begun about the middle of the 3d century, from which time to the end of the 7th there stretches a continuous series of controversies on questions relating to God and the Trinity, the incarnation and person of Christ, original sin, and regenerating grace. In the course of these, successive forms of opinion on these subjects were discussed, condemned, and stamped as heresies—the Sabellian, Arian, Apollinarian, Macedonian, Nestorian, Pelagian, Monophysite, Semi-pelagian, Monothelite doctrines. In sharp contrast with these opposing heresies, and sometimes in a narrow strait between them, the doctrine of the church was defined more and more precisely. As authoritative expressions of this doctrine we have the first six ecumenical councils, with the provincial ones in the West that condemned Pelagianism and Semi-pelagianism, and the creed of Nicæa (325) as enlarged and altered at Constantinople (381), with the decisions of Chalcedon (451) against Monophysitism, Orange and Valentia (529) against Semi-pelagianism, and Constantinople (1st Trullan, 680) against Monothelitism.

This long series of keen and varied controversies on the loftiest doctrines represents a vast amount of intellectual activity in the field of dogmatic, and some of the greatest names in the church's history belong to this period. Athanasius, Basil, the two Gregories, the two Cyrils, and Chrysostom in the East, and Ambrose, Augustine, and Hilary in the West, are but a few of the more outstanding and best known of the church's teachers during these controversies. On the whole it may be said that they have done their work satisfactorily and well, in establishing the true Christian view on the special doctrines they had to discuss; and the decisions of the church on these points have been very generally accepted in after times. The Reformers adopted either tacitly or expressly the whole body of them as in accordance with Scripture; and even in the immense upturning of opinions on all theological doctrines that has been going on in modern times, the faith of Nicæa has been maintained by the majority of theologians. Even the more detailed creed of Chalcedon is questioned by comparatively few, though the still more minute discussions and definitions after that have ceased to command the respect and interest of the modern church. But while the theologians of this polemic period were thus successful in establishing and defining some of the more important doctrines of Christianity, and by so doing contributed very valuable materials for dogmatic, they did little or nothing towards the construction of the system as an organic unity. Very few of their works even attempt such a task. The *Catecheses* of Cyril of Jerusalem contain an exposition of the various articles of the creed, and so may be said to exhibit a body of divinity such as was then generally held; but they do so not in a scientifically theological manner, but rather in that of simple popular teaching. Augustine's *Enchiridion*, *de Fide, Spe, et Caritate*, is a more properly theological attempt to lay the basis of a connected and organic system; but it is very brief and summary, and holds a very subordinate position among the writings of that great father in comparison with his argumentative and controversial treatises on the particular doctrines that he did so much to elucidate and defend. Perhaps a more real evidence of a sense of the organic connection of all the doctrines of Christianity is to be found in the recognition of the affinity between the apparently unconnected heresies of Nestorianism and Pelagianism, which were both alike condemned by the council of Ephesus in 431.

The results of the polemic discussions of nearly five centuries were gathered by John of Damascus into a series

of dogmatic propositions in his work *ἀκριβῆς ἐκδοσις τῆς ἀρθοδόξου πίστεως*, which remained for the Eastern Church the chief authority in theology for a thousand years after. There has been, however, no living onward movement in the comprehension of Christian doctrine in the Greek Church; and if on this account that great section of Christendom has escaped the rigid formulating of the many corruptions in doctrine, government, and life that took place in the Western Church, it has been at the expense of resting in a system of mere dead orthodoxy that could neither hinder nor heal practical corruption. In the West, however, there was a powerful intellectual life, even in what are generally called the Dark Ages; and that being directed towards the doctrines of the church gave a continual progress and a new epoch to theology, though in a peculiar and not the most healthy form.

III. The third period in the history of dogmatic, extending from the 8th century to the beginning of the 16th, may be called in general, from its most remarkable development, the scholastic age; though scholasticism, strictly so called, is usually reckoned to extend only from the 11th century to the middle of the 15th. But the times before and after these narrower limits were characterized, only in less degree, by the same general tendency of thought. The doctrines of the church were established as of indisputable authority, and had begun to be collected in the form of books of sentences (*Sententiarum Libri*) from the fathers, by Isidore of Seville, and others; and by means of such compilatory labours the learning and theology of former ages were preserved through the devastating flood of the barbarian immigrations. Any fresh theological discussions in this age were few and unimportant, tending for the most part in the direction of sacerdotalism, as in the formation of the dogma of transubstantiation. But by and by a mighty intellectual force took hold of the whole collected dogmatic material, and reared out of it the great scholastic systems, which have been compared to the grand Gothic cathedrals that were the work of the same ages. The character of these systems of dogmatic may be understood by bearing in mind the two leading principles of the scholastic thinking. One was the acceptance as of absolute authority of whatever had been decided in Scripture or by the church; and the other was the application of the notions and syllogisms of formal logic to these doctrines, for the purpose of demonstrating their truth to the understanding.<sup>1</sup> With such principles, it was natural that the systems constructed should be lacking in unity and a real grasp of the essence of Christianity. They attempted, indeed, the harmonizing of philosophy and theology, of reason and faith, but they could only do so in a mechanical way, and by a kind of compromise. On the one hand, reason was entirely subjected to faith in the acceptance of all the doctrines of the church as so many decisions or sentences that were not to be criticised or called in question. This made it impossible to grapple with the fundamental and general principles underlying the particular opinions that were received as authoritative; and it was only in regard to their details and application that free inquiry was allowed. Hence in the scholastic works we find a series of doctrines or questions on different subjects following one after another, but not connected in any natural way as parts of one organic whole. On the other hand, however, reason was allowed such full scope in deducing consequences from the established doctrines, and that by purely formal processes, that a rationalistic character was imparted to a large extent to the whole body of the scholastic theology. At the same

<sup>1</sup> See Hampden's *Bampton Lectures*, p. 46, 347; Schwegler's *History of Philosophy*, sect. xxii.; Baur, *Verstehungslehre*, p. 147, foll.; Hagenbach, *Dogmengeschichte*, sect. 149.

time, as reason was excluded from the great questions of principle, by the absolute authority accorded to the church's decisions, it could only find scope in questions of detail, and the more intellectual vigour was applied to theology the more minute, subtle, and unprofitable did its results become. The scholastic age produced no system of Christian doctrine that has, as a whole, retained any value in after ages; though in it some doctrines were more distinctly articulated than before,—particularly that of the atonement, by Anselm; and the keen and subtle analysis to which all doctrines and conceptions were subjected has produced many distinctions that have been found useful in later times as conducing to clearness of thought.

The decline and fall of scholasticism was due to the gradually awakening consciousness of the unsoundness of the principles on which it rested. The nominalistic controversy shook men's faith in the absolute identity of thought and being, reason and authority; and the identification of theology and philosophy came to an end. The latter refused to be any longer the mere handmaid of the church; and from the assertion of its freedom the history of modern philosophy dates. This was necessarily a fatal blow to the scholastic theology; and at the same time the great religious movement of the Reformation made a reconstruction of the system of church doctrine necessary.

IV. The age of the Reformation, occupying the greater part of the 16th century, may be said to form by itself a fourth period in the history of dogmatic, for it was animated by a spirit that distinguishes it both from the preceding and from the following time. The Reformation was a movement too full of spiritual life and activity in many directions to be adequately described by any single phrase; but for the present purpose it may comprehensively enough be said to be the reassertion of the principle of the direct and personal relation of the believer to God. This involved the sweeping away of all ecclesiastical authority and mediation, and the assertion of the sole authority of God's word and of justification by faith, which have been called the formal and material principles of Protestantism. This also necessarily brought with it a new conception of theology. Christianity was no longer a new law, and saving faith was no longer the intellectual assent to certain doctrines; Christianity was a new life, offered in the gospel and received by the soul's trust (*fiducia*) in Christ. Hence, when the Reformers came, as some of the greatest of them did, to give a systematic statement of Christian doctrine, they not only rejected those tenets which had been held in the mediæval church on no higher authority than that of tradition and ecclesiastical decisions, but they also found that they could exhibit a much more organic unity in the body of Christian doctrine, because they regarded it not as a necessary means or step towards spiritual life, but as the outcome and systematic presentation of that life which is obtained and preserved directly by faith in Christ. The great theological works of the Reformation age were not for the most part written purely in the interest of science or system, but for more practical purposes, for the defence of the new doctrines against attacks made upon them, or for the guidance of ministers in the practical teaching of the people. But it is nevertheless true that in these ways were produced works which had more of the symmetry and unity of a complete system than any that had previously appeared. This can only be accounted for by assuming that the Reformers had laid hold of the right principle of theology, and that the new life of the Reformation had carried them above and beyond the mistaken view of Christianity that had long hindered a right construction of dogmatic. The *Loci Communes Theologici* of Melancthon (1st ed. 1521, final form 1550), and the *Institutio*

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*Religionis Christianæ* of Calvin (1st ed. 1535, final form 1559), are the two chief systematic works of this period, and have formed the starting-points of the Lutheran and Reformed dogmatic respectively. The system expounded in them is summarily set forth in the several Protestant Confessions of this era, and various special doctrines were elaborated and defended by other leaders of the Reformation. The Reformers accepted the doctrinal statements of the ancient creeds and of the first four general councils as scriptural and true; they also adopted with great earnestness the Augustinian doctrines of grace, while they added to them the principle with which Luther's name is inseparably associated of justification by faith, and that of the supreme authority of the Bible as the rule of faith and life,—both of these being in their view witnessed and guaranteed by the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Maintaining these principles, they rejected the authority of the church, the multiplication and magical efficacy of the sacraments, the merit of good works, monastic vows, penance, purgatory, and other corruptions of the Middle Ages. In their hands, theology lost the merely objective character that it had borne in patristic and mediæval times, and was brought into closer connection with religious and Christian life, by the recognition and cultivation of its subjective side. The vital matter with them was, not to have right opinions about the Trinity and the hypostatic union, but to be sure of the true way of salvation by Christ. Their writings are pervaded by a warmth of spiritual life, as well as by a freshness of theological thought, that mark them as the genuine products of a creative age in the history of Christian doctrine. The Reformation age may be said to have closed with the final fixing of the Protestant doctrines in the generally-accepted symbolical books, which took place for the Lutheran church in the adoption of the *Formula Concordiæ* in 1580, and for the Reformed churches in the decisions of the Synod of Dort in 1618–19. Even earlier, however, a declension may be observed from the lofty and free spirit of the first Reformers; and a somewhat different character began to mark the theology of both the branches of the Protestant church.

V. A fifth period in the history of dogmatic, which may be called the confessional one, extends from the beginning of the 17th till near the end of the 18th century. During this time the doctrinal systems, of which the foundations had been laid by Melancthon and Calvin, were elaborated and carried into details with great learning and acuteness; the various doctrines were most carefully and precisely defined, distinguished, and defended. The 17th century was an age of theological controversy. The Roman Catholic Church had recovered from the shock of the Reformation, and by the aid of the Jesuits and the powerful reaction inaugurated by them, had regained strength not only materially but intellectually. Controversialists like Bellarmine, Petavius, and Bossuet taxed the learning and ingenuity of Protestantism to meet them. There were also many less necessary and profitable controversies among Protestants themselves; and almost every theologian was led to devote his energy to the attack of what he held to be error, and the maintenance of true doctrine. Much valuable argument was brought into use in the course of these discussions, and the system of dogmatic was more fully worked out than it had been before. The great dogmatic works of the 17th century, such as those of John Gerhard, Calovius, Quenstedt, and Baier in the Lutheran church, and of Francis Turretin, Mastricht, and De Moor among the Reformed, are more minute, precise, and full in their exhibition of the doctrines of the faith than the writings of the Reformers, and they contain a great deal of vigorous and profound thought. Never probably have the doctrines which they handle been so ably and thoroughly

discussed. They were, however, treated somewhat in the scholastic method that had prevailed before the Reformation. The theologians of the 17th century did indeed clearly perceive and firmly maintain the principle of the sole authority of Scripture, which was one of those involved in the revolt against the authority of the church and hierarchy of Rome. Hence, in point of matter, their systems are vastly superior to those of the schoolmen, freer from traditional and sacerdotal dogmas, and far more in harmony with apostolic teaching. But they failed to apprehend a deeper principle that was implicitly contained in the Reformation movement, viz., that Christian doctrine, instead of preceding Christian life as a necessary means to it, must come after its actual experience. Sound doctrine was regarded as the preliminary condition of spiritual life; and as it had thus to be established apart from the living experience of Christianity in the soul, it must rest on purely external authority. This was found in an extreme and one-sided view of the inspiration of Scripture, as equivalent to verbal or literal dictation, and in an uncritical and indiscriminate use of proof texts from all portions of Scripture, without due regard to their historical connection and scope. These became to many of the divines of that age very much what the sentences of the fathers and councils had been to the schoolmen; and an undue weight was sometimes allowed even to the avowedly human forms in which Protestant doctrine had been expressed. An excessive subtlety and minuteness of definition were also often adopted; and when these were made matters of faith in different parts of the church, numerous schisms and separations took place. The rigid exclusiveness of the Lutheran divines on the basis of the *Formula Concordiæ*, the intolerant zeal of the Anglicans for episcopacy and ceremonies, the extreme doctrinal minuteness of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* of 1675, and the narrowness of some of the English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians are instances of this tendency; and the disastrous effects of many of these are well known. The issue of this form of theology was very similar to that of the scholastic system. It was gradually undermined by the spirit of rationalism calling in question the validity of its minute definitions. This tendency had been active from the time of the Reformation in various forms; and though for long it was controverted and excluded from the Protestant Churches, in the course of the 18th century it brought about a general disintegration of their dogmatics. It was found that there was not sufficient evidence to maintain the too minutely articulated systems in the face of a more critical study of the Bible; and the orthodoxy that had rested on an insecure foundation was for a time almost entirely overthrown. In nearly all the churches there came, in various forms, an age of indifference and even unbelief in the old doctrines of the gospel; and this was generally accompanied with a declension in spiritual life. It was in Germany that the sceptical movement took the most pronounced form; and there, accordingly, the break with the theology of the 17th century has been most complete. In this country the triumph of rationalism has never been so absolute, and the transition to a new era in the history of theology has not been so marked.

VI. But a new period has undoubtedly come, since the beginning of the present century. A reaction has set in against the rationalism that overthrew the older dogmatics. In some cases, indeed, this has taken the form of a simple reassertion and re-establishment of the old systems of doctrine, as in the school of Hengstenberg, Hävernick, Philippi, and others, who maintain the Lutheran orthodoxy in all its rigidity, and in many British and American divines, who reproduce the Calvinistic system in its precise 17th century form. But by many the need is felt of more thoroughly