

# THE PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME VIII

JANUARY 1910

NUMBER I

## CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND DOGMATIC THEOLOGY.

I. When we speak of "Christian Experience" certain problems at once suggest themselves—problems of importance for Dogmatic Theology. What is experience? Can we speak of "experience" in regard to the objects of religious faith and knowledge? What do we mean by "Christian experience"? How is its normal character to be determined? What is its value for Christian Apologetics? What is its importance in Dogmatic Theology and in regard to the knowledge of Christian truth? In the limits of this article we cannot hope to touch upon all of these problems. We wish, however, to indicate the nature of Christian experience, and from the point of view thus gained to point out its significance for religious knowledge and Dogmatic Theology.

Since the Erlangen theology reached its culmination in Frank, there have appeared a number of monographs on "religious experience" and "Christian experience" or "experience of salvation" (*Heilserfahrung*), as the Germans call it. In none of these monographs, however, is there any full or adequate treatment accorded to the place of Christian experience in Dogmatic Theology. In 1894 E. Haack<sup>1</sup> published an Address on the *Nature and Significance of*

<sup>1</sup> E. Haack, *Ueber Wesen und Bedeutung der christlichen Erfahrung*, 1894.

*Christian Experience*, in which, after setting forth the nature of Christian experience, he attempted to point out very briefly its significance for Christian faith, its relation to Scripture, and its place in religious knowledge. In 1898 E. Petran<sup>2</sup> wrote a book on the *Idea and Nature of Moral-religious Experience*, which is devoted almost exclusively to setting forth the nature of religious experience, especially in its relation to other forms of experience; this book contains practically nothing, however, concerning the use and significance of the idea in theology. Petran's book was the occasion of a short article by Schian<sup>3</sup> on the *Idea of Experience in Dogmatics*, which touches on the nature of Christian experience; the determination of its normal or truly Christian character; its value as a ground of belief; and its significance for Dogmatics. All of these questions, however, are simply touched upon in the briefest possible manner. In the following year, 1899, and in the same journal, H. Holtzmann<sup>4</sup> published two articles on the subject. He raises the question whether there is such a thing as religious experience, and, having answered this question affirmatively, proceeds to determine the "content" of religious experience in general. He remarks, however, at the outset that he does not intend to touch upon the questions of "how far Experience can be used as a source in Dogmatics, or whether and how it can be used to ground doctrinal propositions". The same thing is true of the monograph on *The Nature of Religious Experience* by G. Heine,<sup>5</sup> which was published in 1900, and which confines itself to the subject indicated in the title.

<sup>2</sup> E. Petran, *Beiträge zur Verständigung über Begriff und Wesen der sittlich-religiösen Erfahrung*, 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Schian, "Der Begriff Erfahrung in der Dogmatik"; *Protestantische Monatshefte*, 1898, pp. 378-388.

<sup>4</sup> H. Holtzmann, "Ueber Begriff und Inhalt der religiösen Erfahrung", *Protestantische Monatshefte*, 1899, pp. 217-225, 270-285.

<sup>5</sup> G. Heine, *Das Wesen der religiösen Erfahrung*, 1900. The recent book by H. Bois, *La Valeur de l'Expérience Religieuse*, 1908, discusses some of the problems connected with religious experience and religious epistemology, but gives no discussion of religious experience in relation to Dogmatic Theology.

There are, however, two recent monographs on Christian Experience, which do contribute to the subject of the relation of Christian Experience and Dogmatic Theology, though they are valuable chiefly from a historical point of view. In 1902 H. Sogemeier<sup>6</sup> wrote a monograph on *The Conception of Christian Experience*, in which his purpose was to investigate its nature with especial reference to its application in Dogmatic Theology. By far the greater part of this essay, however, is devoted to a discussion of the nature of Christian experience. Only the last fifteen pages enter upon its application in theology, and this brief closing section is devoted chiefly to a defense of Schleiermacher's method over against that of Frank; though the author does indicate in what way Schleiermacher is to be corrected, and lays down two rules of method, or rather indicates how two main objections to his method are to be met. The recent book by K. Wolf,<sup>7</sup> published in 1906, entitled *The Origin and Application of the Idea of Religious Experience in the Theology of the Nineteenth Century*, is helpful as a guide to the study of the historical development of the subject, taking up, as it does, the views of Schleiermacher, Hofmann, Plitt, Frank, and Dorner. Only four pages, however, are devoted to the author's discussion of the relation of Christian experience to religious knowledge. In these few pages Wolf simply repeats the criticisms which were made by H. Cremer and Kähler<sup>8</sup> in reference to the attempt to make the Christian consciousness the source of theological knowledge, adding a few brief suggestions of his own.

In America, L. F. Stearns,<sup>9</sup> late Professor in Bangor

<sup>6</sup> H. Sogemeier, "Der Begriff der christlichen Erfahrung hinsichtlich seiner Verwendbarkeit in der Dogmatik untersucht", pub. in *Beiträge zur Förderung christl. Theologie*, VI, 1902, pp. 113-186.

<sup>7</sup> K. Wolf, *Ursprung und Verwendung des religiösen Erfahrungsbegriffes in der Theologie des 19ten Jahrhunderts*, 1906.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H. Cremer in Zöcklers Handbuch III<sup>3</sup>, pp. 55ff.; Kähler, *Wissenschaft der christl. Lehre*,<sup>2</sup> p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> L. F. Stearns, *The Evidence of Christian Experience*, 1890.

Theological Seminary, published a book in 1890 on the *Evidence of Christian Experience*. This is really a treatise in Apologetics, using the argument from Experience. Its attempts to find Christian doctrine implicated in Christian experience are only incidental. But in the Stone Lectures in Princeton Theological Seminary in 1900 Prof. F. H. Foster<sup>10</sup> has sought to trace the contribution of Christian experience to the system of evangelical doctrine, following quite closely the view of Frank; and defending that theologian against the criticism of Kaftan.

From this brief enumeration of the recent literature on the subject, it can readily be seen that it is the question of the nature of religious, and especially of Christian experience, which has occupied the chief place in the discussions of the subject; and that the use of Christian experience as a source of Christian doctrine has been less prominent since the time of Frank's death, that is, during the last fifteen years. Sogemeier no doubt, as we have seen, has advocated the use of Christian experience in Dogmatics, and Schian, as we have also seen, would give it a large place as a norm of Christian truth. Foster has attempted to deduce a number of Christian doctrines from Christian experience. Nevertheless, the advocacy of an "experiential theology" in this sense has declined during the last twenty years. This is no doubt due in large part to the influence of Ritschl and the theologians who may in a general way be regarded as belonging to his school. Their emphasis on revelation through the historical Christ led them to criticise Frank's standpoint and method,<sup>11</sup> whereas Frank<sup>12</sup> saw in Ritschlianism a renewal of rationalism. Most of the literature upon

<sup>10</sup> F. H. Foster, *Christian Life and Theology, or the Contribution of Christian Experience to the System of Evangelical Doctrine*.

<sup>11</sup> Herrmann, *Theol. Literaturzeitung*, No. 22, 1881, pp. 524ff. Kaftan, "Glaube u. Dogmatik", *Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche*, 1891, pp. 509ff. *Dogmatik* <sup>3</sup> and <sup>4</sup>, 1901, p. 31. Also "Zur Dogmatik", *Zeitschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche*, 1903, pp. 505ff. Cf. also Gottschick, *Die Kirchlichkeit der sogenannten kirchliche Theol.*, 1890.

<sup>12</sup> Frank, *Die kirchliche Bedeutung der Ritschlsche Theol.*, 1888.

the subject has been largely in criticism or defense of Frank. H. Cremer criticised Frank's method in Zöckler's *Handbuch der theologischen Wissenschaften*. Kähler also discussed and criticised this theological method. Also several members of the Ritschlian school have written very fully in criticism of Frank's position.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, in the year 1900, in the *Beiträge* of Schlatter and Cremer, Daxer<sup>14</sup> published a long article in defense of Frank against his critics.

The questions of the place of Christian experience as a ground of faith, and of the experiential argument for the truth of Christianity, have called out an extensive literature, and have been discussed by the Ritschlian school, as well as by Kähler and Köstlin. We shall not attempt to give any account of this discussion. A very good idea of its course can readily be obtained from the writings of Köstlin, Kähler, Reischle, and Wendt.<sup>15</sup>

II. When, now, we ask what is the nature of "Expe-

<sup>13</sup> Cf., for example, Kaftan in his Art. "Glaube und Dogmatik", *Zeitsch. für Theol. u. Kirche*, 1891; *Dogmatik*<sup>3 and 4</sup>, 1901, pp. 31ff.; also "Zur Dogmatik", *Zeitschr.*, 1903; also Herrmann, *Beweis des Glaubens*, 1889, pp. 173-184; Reischle, *Zeitschr. für Theol. u. Kirche*, VII, 216ff.; Gottschick, *Die Kirchlichkeit der sogenannten kirchlichen Theol.*, 1890, pp. 57ff.; Kattenbusch, *Von Schleiermacher zu Ritschl*<sup>3</sup>, 1903, pp. 73ff. Lobstein, *Einleitung in die evang. Dogmatik*, 1897, pp. 82ff.

<sup>14</sup> Daxer: "Der Subjectivismus in Franks System der christlichen Gewissheit", *Beiträge zur Förderung der christlichen Theologie*, Jahrg IV, Heft 5. Daxer seeks to show that most of the criticisms on Frank rested on misunderstandings. He says that Frank's critics fail to distinguish between "Christian certitude" (*i. e.*, certitude of the truth of Christianity) and assurance of faith or certitude as regards one's own salvation (*Heilsgewissheit*); and that they also fail to distinguish the scientific question as to the ground of Christian certitude from the practical question how to bring an unbeliever to faith. It is true that Frank makes these distinctions clearly; but not all of his critics have failed to realize this, nor can their chief objections be so easily removed.

<sup>15</sup> Köstlin, *Die Begründung unserer sittlich-religiösen Ueberzeugung*, 1893. Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche biblische Christus*<sup>2</sup>, 1896. Reischle, "Der Streit über die Begründung des Glaubens", *Zeitschr. für Theol. u. Kirche*, VII, pp. 171-264; Wendt, *Der Erfahrungsbeweis für die Wahrheit des Christentums*, 1897; also *System der christl. Lehre.*, Teil I, 1906, pp. 58-72.

rience" in general and of "Christian Experience" in particular, we find a very considerable divergence of opinion so far as the "content" of Christian experience is concerned. This, however, does not concern us at present. We need to ask what is meant, from the formal standpoint, by the word "experience". The term is easier to describe than to define. All we shall attempt is a description of it. When we approach the term "experience" from the purely formal standpoint, we find quite general agreement as to its meaning. In general we may say that "experience" denotes a state or states of consciousness brought about by a contact, as immediate as possible, with an object, and through the appropriate channel on the part of the subject. Each of these ideas is determinative of the meaning of "experience", and each expresses practically the same thing from a slightly different point of view. Thus the term "experience" is used only where the contact with the object experienced is as immediate as possible. For example, with regard to the objects of sense perception the immediacy required excludes mediation through the mental or spiritual life of other men. We are told by someone that fire burns, but we do not call that an experiential knowledge of the fact. When, however, we put our finger in the flame, then we say that we know by experience that fire burns. When we turn from the objects of sense perception to the sphere of inner consciousness, we say that all the contents of our consciousness are the objects of an "immediate awareness" which makes it proper to say that they are objects of which we have experience or experiential knowledge. When, however, we have regard to the objective reference of these states of consciousness, then only those are experiential which give us an immediate knowledge of the object. Thus, we know by experience what reflective thought is in as far as such thought is included in the content of our consciousness, but as regards its objective reference we do not say that we have an experiential knowledge of the objective relations which are the objects of such reflective thought, and we distinguish

knowledge so gained from the experiential knowledge which we have of the reflective thought itself, as well as of the objects of sense perception.

The same thing holds true when we turn from the objects of sense perception and self-consciousness to the mental life of other men. Here, of course, such immediate contact with the object as has just been described, is by the nature of the case impossible. Nevertheless, we speak very properly of having an experiential knowledge of other men when their inner life is known to us through the medium of their outward acts or words and our sense perception and thought. In this way when we hear of the kindness of a certain man, we do not say that we have experienced his kindness, but only when we ourselves have seen his kind acts, do we say that we have an experiential knowledge of his kindness.

The other idea which we mentioned is also of importance in describing what is meant by the term experience, namely, that the contact with the object must be by the appropriate channel in the subject of the experience. With this idea in mind, we may distinguish between experience in a looser and in a stricter sense. Thus, for example, we may hear from others that fire burns. In this case we cannot speak of experience at all. We may see fire burning an object, in which case it is in a certain sense correct to say that we know by experience that fire burns. But we do not speak of experience in the strictest sense until we have ourselves been burnt by fire. The sense of sight is not the appropriate medium in this case, but the sense of touch. In like manner we may be told what is the love of a mother for her child, in which case, again, we do not speak of knowing it by experience. We may, however, see a mother's love exhibited in acts of self-sacrifice for her child, in which case we can in a looser sense speak of knowing by experience what is a mother's love. But we only speak of knowing a mother's love by experience in the stricter sense of the term when in our own lives and hearts we feel and know directly the love of our own mother.

This same distinction holds true of moral and spiritual experiences. Thus a man may have no experience in any sense of the term of the sinfulness of sin. This may be a truth of which he has simply been told. Or again he may have seen sin working destruction in the lives of others, and so in the looser sense may be said to know by experience the sinfulness of sin. But in the stricter sense an experiential knowledge cannot here be spoken of, because in this case the appropriate channel is one's own conscience or inner life or what the Scriptures call the heart. Hence, though the contact with the effects of sin in the above case be immediate, that is, not mere hearsay, the channel or means of appropriation is not the proper one. Consequently it is only when guilty conscience stands convicted and the sinner feels his guilt and pollution in the heart, that an experiential knowledge of sin can be spoken of.

Thus, in general, "experience" is a state of consciousness brought about by a contact with an object as immediate as possible, and received by the subject through the appropriate channel. It involves, therefore, an objective cause which produces it, and a capacity on the part of the subject for receiving the impressions from the object. The latter is just as essential as the former. We could have no experience of music if we were deaf, and no experiential appreciation of a symphony of Beethoven if, though not deaf, we had no musical sense.

When we come, now, to consider briefly the idea of religious experience, we can see that it does not differ formally from experience in general. It should be noted, to begin with, that the distinction between "inner" and "outer" experience is not adequate to differentiate religious experience from other forms of experience. This distinction, if an accurate one, would be insufficient for this purpose, since many so-called "inner experiences" cannot be called religious. But, in addition to this, the distinction itself involves a certain amount of confusion. All experience is from its very nature "inner experience", that is, it involves an "immediate aware-

ness" of its objects. The distinction between "inner" and "outer", therefore, is only a distinction between the objects of experience. And it is only from this standpoint, namely, that of the producing cause, that religious experience can be distinguished from other forms of experience. Religious experience, then, is a state of consciousness which is produced by a transcendent cause, that is, by God, and which gives an experiential knowledge of God. God may act upon the soul mediately or immediately. We can set no limits to His power. But, more or less remotely, ultimately religious experience is produced by God and terminates on God.<sup>16</sup> Its presuppositions, therefore, are the existence of God, His knowableness, and the capability of man to know God, or the religious nature of man. And since God can be known only as He chooses to make Himself known, we may say that the presuppositions of general or natural religious experience are the existence of God, general revelation, and the image of God in man or man's religious nature, which alone makes

<sup>16</sup> Whatever be the differences among theologians as to the content or essential nature of religious and Christian experience (*vid.* Köstlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-100; Petran, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-123, on the views of such theologians as Dorner, Frank, Lipsius, Reischle, Herrmann, Kähler, etc.), there is substantial agreement as to the idea of religious and Christian experience from the purely formal point of view. *Cf.*, for example, the definition of Petran, *op. cit.*, p. 124,—religious experience includes "alle die innere Vorgänge, welche im Geistesleben eines Menschen sich beobachten lassen, der unter den Einfluss des durch äussere Mittel auf unser Inneres wirkenden Gottes gekommen ist." *Cf.* Heine, *op. cit.*, pp. 25, 26—Experience in general is defined as "jede von aussen an uns herantretende sinnliche oder geistige Einwirkung, welche mit unserem eigenen seelischen Leben so verwächst, dass sie einen wesentlichen Bestandteil desselben ausmacht, und von deren Macht wir ein mehr oder minder klares Bewusstsein haben". These experiences are Christian experiences (pp. 75, 76) "wenn die Einwirkung als unmittelbar oder mittelbar von Christo ausgehend, mehr oder minder klar erkannt oder auch nur geahnt wird". *Cf.* also Sogemeier, *op. cit.*, in the *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theol.*, 1902, p. 141. "Christliche Erfahrung ist das beim Anschauen der durch das Wort der ersten Zeugen übermittelten historischen Erscheinung Jesu Christi in den Gläubigen gewirkte Erlebnis Gottes, welches seinen vollen erfahrungsmässigen Character gewinnt in Verbindung mit der durch die Wirksamkeit des Heiligen Geistes gegründeten und erhaltenen christlichen Gemeinde."

him capable of receiving a revelation. So far, therefore, is it from true that religious experience is the sole argument in Apologetics, that on the contrary a very considerable body of philosophical apologetics is presupposed by general religious experience.

The idea of Christian experience is, from the purely formal standpoint, similar to that of general religious experience. If, namely, the object experienced and from which the determining influence goes forth is Christ, then the resulting state or states of consciousness are called Christian experience. When, therefore, we speak of Christian experience, we do not mean simply that the truth contained in some general religious experience is Christian in the sense of being like the teaching of Christ. This seems to be what Heine means by Christian experience in a "mediate" sense. Such an experience should not properly be called Christian at all. Christian experience is an experience of Christ or of God in Christ and through Christ. And it is an experience which is caused by Christ as the revealer of God. That is, Christian experience depends objectively on the special revelation which has become the necessary mode of revelation for sinful man, and this experience depends subjectively on the effect of Christ's Spirit upon the religious nature of man, fitting it to apprehend this revelation.

These matters will be taken up more fully presently, and need not detain us now. We simply mention them in order to set forth from the formal point of view the nature of Christian experience. It is, in a word, an experience the nature of which is determined by the nature of Christianity.

III. In asking what is the importance of Christian experience for the knowledge of Christian truth, it is necessary to go back again to the more general question of the relation of experience to knowledge. To answer this question adequately, it would be necessary to pass in review all the modern theories in epistemology and to state and defend a philosophical theory of knowledge. Such a task

cannot, of course, be attempted here. Certain general positions, however, must be laid down, in order that an adequate view of the relation of Christian experience to Christian knowledge may be attained.

That "experience" is important for knowledge goes without saying. Indeed, in a certain sense it is true that knowledge grows out of experience. But when it is said that knowledge grows out of experience, or that experience furnishes the raw material for thought, it is not at all meant that knowledge grows out of bare feeling, or that consciousness with its thought differentiations and content could grow out of a bare undifferentiated state of feeling. In a word, feelings do not produce ideas. What has just been said holds true in the sphere of the knowledge of the external world. When we say in this sphere that experience furnishes the material for knowledge, we do not mean that the first thing in our consciousness is a lot of bare feelings, nor even undifferentiated and unrelated sensations which the activity of thought in perception constitutes as related objects. It is true, of course, that a psychological analysis of the process of perception shows that its primary elements are sensations. But these do not exist for consciousness unrelated, and the percept or the object as perceived is the first thing given in the knowledge of the external world. Hence when it is said that experience conditions knowledge in this sphere, all that is meant is that perceptual experience furnishes the material for reflective and scientific thought, or as Kant would put it, for the categories of the understanding.

In precisely the same way, when it is said that experience is important in the general knowledge of God, what is meant is that experience has its place as a condition of knowledge in this sphere in the sense intended by an empirical religious philosophy, as over against Rationalism (in the philosophical sense of the term) and Mysticism. Rationalism in both its forms sought to discredit experience as a source of religious knowledge. The object of Kant's

attack was what is called "Dogmatic Rationalism"; and the classic example of this abstract use of reason to the neglect of experience, as Sogemeier has pointed out,<sup>17</sup> was the so-called ontological proof or argument for the existence of God. By pure reason, that is, by means of the idea or conception of God, it was sought to prove God's existence. It was, in part, to attack this use of the reason that Kant wrote his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which he sought to show the necessary place which experience occupies in knowledge as furnishing its content, thus setting aside "Dogmatic Rationalism".

But Kant arbitrarily took over Hume's conception of experience, and without warrant limited the term or notion to its sensational form or aspect. In consequence of this he held that all ideas transcending the sphere of sense perception and scientific cognition, that is, all religious ideas, were without "content", and hence that no "theoretic" knowledge in the religious sphere was possible. In other words, he too discredited experience in religious knowledge, and sought to vindicate the objects of religious knowledge as moral postulates. His religious philosophy may be called ethical Rationalism to distinguish it from dogmatic Rationalism.

On the other hand, Mysticism, neglecting all ordinary experience as a source of religious knowledge, sought to show that all religious ideas spring from the direct contact of God with the soul, influencing its feelings, out of which religious knowledge was supposed to spring.

Now, over against Rationalism in both its forms, and this type of Mysticism, an empirical religious philosophy may be said to be one which vindicates a place for ordinary experience as a source of religious knowledge, or which seeks to show that we can know God as He has revealed Himself, and that this knowledge is in harmony with the rest

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. on this whole subject, Sogemeier, *op. cit.*, in *Beiträge zur Förderung christl. Theologie*, 1902, pp. 115ff.

of our knowledge. This is all that we mean by saying that experience is important for religious knowledge.

On the other hand, it is not meant that religious ideas spring from and are but the symbols of the life of religious feeling and sentiment. We are not now concerned to point out how inadequate is this view of Sabatier's in regard to Christianity. When we have made the doctrinal content of Christianity to be simply the product of the religious life, we have done away with Christianity, because we have explained away as mere symbol all that distinguishes Christianity from natural religion. But we are now speaking of religious knowledge in general; and the theory of religious knowledge just mentioned is inadequate in natural religion just because general religious feeling or sentiment presupposes an intellectual content given by general revelation. For in order that a mere feeling of dependence upon a higher power or feeling of elevation above the compulsion of natural motives may have any really religious significance, we must refer our religious sentiments to God as their object and cause. In other words, before we can speak of really religious experience, we must make the presupposition that certain qualities and attributes which are involved in our conception of God are thus experienced by us, that is, a conception of God lies at the basis of religious experience.<sup>18</sup> Hence when it is said that experience conditions religious knowledge, it is not meant that religious ideas are the product of feeling, but only that an empirical philosophy of religion, in the above indicated sense, is valid as against philosophical Rationalism.

Passing from religious experience in general to specifically Christian experience, it will be seen that its importance as well as its limitations in relation to the knowledge of Christian truth, are determined by a certain dualism, if I may so speak, or at least a certain distinction between Christian knowledge and natural knowledge. This distinction is not the Kantian distinction between the theoretic and the

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. Holtzmann, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

practical reason, nor the Ritschlian distinction between theoretic and religious knowledge. These distinctions introduce a species of dualism into human nature and experience which tends to rob religious knowledge of theoretic validity and so to culminate in religious agnosticism. Those who distinguish thus between religious and theoretic knowledge do not mean that the essence of Christianity consists in mere internal feeling or ethical ideas. On the contrary, they insist that Christianity implies a Christian view of the world; and that the question is as to the nature of the grounds of this world-view. There is, however, a twofold danger in this distinction. In the first place, in seeking to base religious knowledge on purely internal grounds or immanent states of feeling, there is danger that the essence of Christianity be reduced to a merely natural ethical content. And this has actually taken place. In the second place, notwithstanding the fact that theologians like Kaftan and Wendt have sought to modify the position of Ritschl in this matter, the logic of a position which introduces this sharp dualism into human knowledge is, as was said, to rob religious knowledge of theoretic validity, and so to culminate in religious agnosticism.

Moreover, this distinction is not in accordance with the facts of the case. For example, Kaftan<sup>19</sup> distinguishes theoretic and religious knowledge in the following way: He says that, though ordinary or theoretic knowledge has of course an inwardly experienced certitude, nevertheless that which causes this is the external "compulsion of facts"; while, on the other hand, although religious knowledge arises in connection with external facts, the cause and ground of its certitude is internal. Moreover, he says that theoretic knowledge addresses itself simply to the intellect, while religious knowledge springs from faith. There is much that is true in this statement, as we shall see presently. No one doubts that Christian faith has a content of knowl-

<sup>19</sup>Kaftan, Art. "Glaube und Dogmatik", *Zeitschr. für Theologie und Kirche*, I, pp. 479ff.

edge and that true Christian faith, that is, saving faith, depends on an attitude of the heart toward its object. The Ritschlians would be right in pointing to Luther and Calvin as their forerunners if this were what they meant. But they do not mean simply this. Kaftan wishes to infer from his distinctions that there is an essential dualism or distinction in the human consciousness as such between its theoretic and religious knowledge such as will result in a separation of their spheres and objects and the nature of their validity and the categories with which they operate. But this is not the truth of the matter. There is in each case, that is, both in religious and theoretic knowledge, an "objective compulsion", to use Kaftan's phrase. The formal categories, moreover, do not differ. For example, the causal law, though not to be construed in regard to the knowledge of God, in the form it takes in mechanical science, is nevertheless valid in the religious sphere, though in a changed form. And though the subjective organ of apprehension differs in each case, each kind of knowledge presupposes its own organ, and religious knowledge must validate itself to the intellect, unless such a dualism is to be introduced into human knowledge and experience as will result in religious scepticism.

The distinction in our knowledge to which reference has been made, and which is so essential for understanding both the importance and the limitations of Christian experience in relation to the knowledge of Christian truth, then, is not one pertaining to the categories of knowledge, nor to the sphere or objects of cognition, nor to the nature of its validity and its grounds. It is a distinction in the source of knowledge, the norm of truth, and the conditions of its apprehension on the part of the subject of knowledge. It is the distinction expressed by what we call Christian supernaturalism, or by the opposition of sin and grace, the natural consciousness and the regenerate consciousness. That sin has darkened the mind and distorted the natural religious nature of man, that it has marred the image of God in man, that it has obscured the marks of God's hand in nature, all

these are facts of experience no less than truths of Scripture. This has brought about what Kuyper has called an "inversion" of the method of revelation,<sup>20</sup> which now proceeds from what Kuyper has called a special *principium*, and becomes external in a series of supernatural facts at once renovating and revelatory. And this makes necessary also that the knowledge of the meaning of these facts shall come in the same way, that is, external to the individual Christian. Instead of proceeding from the individual and growing to a common knowledge, the opposite of this takes place, and the interpretation of the facts has a central starting point and is to be accepted and appropriated by the individual. This line of thought which Kuyper has richly developed is only another way of saying that the facts which enter into the essence of Christianity are not "bare facts", but come to us interpreted, and that this interpretation or the facts thus interpreted are just Christianity as a historical religion.

We have seen that the content of general or natural religious experience was determined by general revelation; we now see that the content of Christian experience and its character are determined by special revelation. And since this special revelation which thus conditions the nature and content of Christian experience is supernatural, historical and soteriological, it cannot be apprehended by the general or natural religious consciousness, but only by a religious consciousness which has been illuminated supernaturally, and thus prepared for this revelation. Hence, Christian experience is conditioned by and presupposes a faith in the Christian revelation, and this Christian experience and faith are themselves the product of a supernatural cause as well as is the revelation which is supernatural only from the standpoint of its source and method, but which has no supernatural power to produce Christian experience.

As a result, therefore, of the effect of sin upon our religious knowledge, we require that not only our knowledge

<sup>20</sup> A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, E. T., p. 280.

of Christian truth, but that our entire religious knowledge should proceed from a special revelation. The change from the natural knowledge of God, or from the doctrinal content of natural religion to Christianity, as the product of this special revelation, cannot be explained as a natural evolution. In other words, Christian truth is not the product of the natural religious nature of man, and every attempt to explain Christianity as the culminating point of a natural development of religious thought, must end in reducing the doctrinal content of Christianity to that of natural religion. This can be seen from the recent book of Bousset, *Das Wesen der Religion*. In this book the author seeks to explain Christianity as a natural product of the evolution of natural religious thought. The result is that we cannot accept the Christianity of Jesus as the final form of Christianity, but must translate the ideas of Jesus into the forms of our modern notions about God. Thus Christianity is reduced to natural religion construed under the categories of the naturalism of "modernism." The same thing is illustrated from a more mystical standpoint, which regards religious ideas as the symbols of Christian life and experience, in the works of the late Prof. Sabatier, who has reduced Christianity practically to altruism, which latter ethical position he could scarcely maintain from the point of view of his sensationalistic theory of knowledge.

If the facts of sin and redemption be left out of account, then, as Kuyper says, we are not at variance with God, our minds have not been darkened, and from this point of view it is also inconceivable that a restorative power should have been at work, or that there should be a special revelation which does not coincide with the normal process of the development of religious thought. And still further, from this standpoint the knowledge of God in this century should be better than that of the first century, and far higher than that of Abraham or Moses.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, from the standpoint of Christian supernaturalism above set forth,

<sup>21</sup> Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

Christian experience is conditioned by a revelation which is external and supernatural in character, and which thus becomes the source and norm of Christian truth.

We saw that a second consequence of the fact of sin and regeneration was that for the apprehension of this revelation, spiritual illumination was necessary. And here likewise there is a contrast between natural religious knowledge and Christian or supernatural religious knowledge. For since the change from the natural consciousness to the Christian consciousness is by regeneration, it is not possible to explain by any natural means the transition from one form of consciousness to the other, nor is it possible, to use a phrase of Frank,<sup>22</sup> to "elevate" the natural consciousness to the Christian consciousness by purely intellectual means—or any means for that matter—inasmuch as the understanding of the objects of the Christian faith is conditioned by an experiential contact with them by faith. Hence there may be a purely natural knowledge of the objects of Christian faith, but what is requisite is rather a Christian knowledge of these objects, that is a knowledge by the regenerate or Christian consciousness.

On the other hand, in order to a correct understanding of the function of Christian experience in Dogmatics and especially in Apologetics, it is necessary to note that this distinction or dualism between the natural religious consciousness and the Christian consciousness is not so absolute as it is conceived to be by Kuyper. In the first place, sin has not destroyed man's rational nature or cognitive faculties. These continue to function as before. This much of course Kuyper affirms. But in the second place, man's religious nature has not been totally obliterated, and a natural knowledge of God has been, as Kuyper also affirms, preserved by common grace. The new revelation of God is not simply added in a mechanical way to the general revelation, but is corrective of, as well as supplementary to, the natural knowledge of God, and hence presupposes it and rests upon it. Moreover,

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Frank, *System der christlichen Gewissheit*, § 5.

thirdly, it should never be forgotten that in the regenerate man the effects of sin are not removed entirely and all at once. Hence, while it is true that the Christian consciousness cannot be regarded as an evolution by natural causes from the natural consciousness, it is nevertheless true that the Christian man has not an entirely renewed and clarified consciousness, nor has he two consciousnesses side by side as it were. His consciousness is a unit, in principle renewed, yet being relieved of the effects of sin in a process—albeit a supernatural one.

The distinction and opposition, therefore, between the natural and the Christian consciousness, and between natural and Christian knowledge, is only a relative one after all.

IV. This relative dualism between natural and Christian experience, as thus conceived, determines the importance and limitations of Christian experience in relation to Apologetics and Dogmatics, that is, to the questions as to the grounds and content of the Christian faith.

In regard to Apologetics we shall stop only for a summary statement, as our main purpose is to consider the place of Christian experience in Dogmatics. In regard to Apologetics, then, the question is not as to "assurance of faith", or of one's status as a Christian (*Heilsgewissheit*), but as to the grounds of faith. Faith, as Dr. Warfield has said,<sup>23</sup> is conviction of truth grounded on evidence. Psychologically it may be a personal experiential trust, nevertheless it is not without its grounds or evidence. The question is as to the nature of the evidence. Two questions arise. First, is the evidence exclusively internal or experiential? Secondly, is the preparation of the heart by the Spirit, which is necessary for the genesis of faith, only a preparation of the heart to receive evidence, or does it constitute an additional ground of belief?

In reply to this latter question, which must be answered first, we affirm that the preparation of the heart by the

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of this whole subject in relation to Apologetics *vid.* Warfield, Introduction to Vol. I of Beatty's *Apologetics*.

Spirit does constitute an additional ground of belief. Hence it is true, as the "experiential Apologetics" affirms, that the Christian does have a ground of belief which the non-Christian does not have. The validity of this ground, however, is not thereby affected since the Christian's experience is a well attested fact.

In regard to the former question, it should be said that the Christian faith, objectively speaking, rests upon external grounds and evidence because of the historical content of that faith, and that consequently the Christian's faith, subjectively, requires also external grounds in addition to its experiential grounds, that is, this simply means that *assensus* is the logical prius of *fiducia*. It follows also that the non-Christian, although he cannot be made a Christian by argument, but only by the power of the Spirit, yet must be convinced of the possibility of the truth of Christianity, and that the Spirit may use such evidence in his conversion.

In short, the grounds of belief in Christianity are universally valid grounds and should be set forth as such.

We pass on at once to consider the place of Christian experience in Dogmatic Theology. What has been said concerning the nature of Christian experience and its place in religious knowledge, affords us the point of view from which the subject under discussion must be approached. Since the apprehension and understanding of the objects of Christian faith is conditioned by an experiential contact with them through faith, it follows in the first place, that Christian experience is necessary as an "organ" of knowledge in Dogmatic Theology, that is to say—Christian Theology presupposes a Christian subject of knowledge. In other words, the theologian should be a Christian, and approach the subject of his science from the Christian standpoint and from a truly Christian experience. That a *theologia irrogenitorum*, as the Pietists termed it, is impossible, we do not affirm. But if all that has been said concerning Christian experience be true; if sin has darkened the mind, and if spiritual things must be spiritually discerned, as Paul

says, then it will follow that a theology of unregenerate men must always be very inadequate. A man with no artistic sense could scarcely write an adequate treatise on art, and just as little can a man whose religious sense is blinded write a satisfactory treatise on religious faith.

But on the other hand, it is equally important to notice, in the second place, that since Christian experience presupposes a faith the content of which is given by a revelation which is historical, soteriological, and supernatural in character, and since, moreover, on the side of the subject, regeneration does not remove all at once the darkening effects of sin, it must follow that Christian experience can be neither the source nor yet the norm or "principle" of knowledge in Dogmatic Theology. It is not merely that such experience is always the experience of an individual and so individually conditioned; it is not merely that it is difficult to observe and record; nor that it is not a finished product, but one always progressing. These are serious objections, no doubt, to making Christian experience either the source or norm of theological knowledge and truth. But the fundamental and insuperable objections are the ones we have just stated, and which have grown out of our whole previous discussion. Regeneration does not remove all the effects of sin upon the mind instantaneously. If then we seek to use the Christian consciousness or Christian experience as either the source or the norm of Christian faith, we are quite sure to substitute the God our imperfectly renewed natures would like to have, for the God who has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ His Son. Nor will it help matters in this regard to point away from our individual experience to general Christian experience as recorded in hymns, liturgies, and in the history of the Church, as all theologians of this type do. You cannot get rid of the defects and limitations which attach to the Christian experience of the individual simply by multiplying these individual experiences, each of which is thus defective. If, again, recourse is had to the Scriptures, it should be remembered that if the idea of supernat-

ural revelation be either neglected or denied, and the Scriptures be regarded solely from the point of view of a record of primitive Christian experience, we have not obviated the difficulty which we are considering. The Scriptures were written by men only partially sanctified, and in addition to this, from the purely experiential point of view, that is, the viewpoint of immediacy, each one's own experience has the advantage. Whereas, on the other hand, if the idea of supernatural revelation be taken into account, it then becomes impossible to regard Christian experience in any form as either the source or norm of theological knowledge. For we have seen that Christian experience depends on a faith the doctrinal content of which is determined by just this supernatural revelation.

Accordingly, not only is Christian experience dependent upon both transcendent and historical factors, but also as a consequence, faith may mediate to the Christian consciousness truths which altogether transcend our actual Christian experience and which are the objects of faith and hope. Thus the Christian's actual experience of salvation always lags behind the entire blessing of salvation which is really his possession. The entire sphere of Christian truth which comes under Eschatology is an illustration of this fact. And even where the truth lies in a different category, in a case for example where it is a transcendent truth like the doctrine of the Trinity, although it may be most intimately associated with and implicated by Christian experience, it by no means follows that it can be made explicit and drawn out in full statement from that experience. While, therefore, it may be said that Christian experience implicates a definite system of doctrine, it by no means follows that this system can be drawn out and stated from the experience which implicates it. And the history of such attempts shows that in using Christian experience as a source of theological doctrine, one of two things is almost sure to happen—either the entire content of Christian truth as it lies in Scripture is really read into the experience in

order to be thence again drawn out, or else the doctrinal content of Christianity is so stated as to exclude all that transcends experience, that is, all transcendent, supernatural, cosmological and eschatological truths, and Christianity is reduced to a merely ethical or spiritual content.

We are now in a position to review the attempts which have been made to use Christian experience or the Christian consciousness either as the source of Christian doctrine or the norm of Christian truth. We have attained a standpoint from which to criticise these attempts; and it will consequently be possible to go beyond merely indicating their want of consistency, and to point out the fundamental impossibility of all such attempts. It will naturally be impossible within the limits of this article, to discuss such attempts in reference to specific doctrines or to go into details. We shall be concerned only with their general method of procedure.

In the first place, we may dismiss with a few words the mode of procedure which simply transfers the method of natural empirical science into the sphere of theology. It is in order to avoid questions as to the objective reference of states of religious experience and the objective validity of religious ideas, that the method of natural science is thus taken over into theology. Just as physical science investigates physical phenomena and the empirical laws which they follow, so in like manner theology is made to investigate spiritual phenomena, and thus it become really nothing more than a "phenomenology of the religious consciousness." In this way theology loses its right to exist as a distinct science, and becomes a branch of empirical psychology. It can not only do without God; in accordance with its principles it can do without the human soul. Religious experience is merely described and related to the rest of the contents of consciousness. This method will not be able even to make the affirmations to which Sogemeier limits it.<sup>24</sup> He says that all that such a method can

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Sogemeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 114ff.

do is to affirm that religious experience is an illusory form of human experience, or to validate for it an "abiding place" in the life of the human spirit by showing that without this experience the life of the human soul does not attain its complete development. But such an affirmation as this involves questions of ideals, of values, and of the objective validity of religious knowledge, which this method cannot answer at all. Such a method of procedure not only will do away with the right of theology to exist as a separate science; it proceeds upon an entirely gratuitous assumption, namely, that knowledge is invalid beyond the phenomenal sphere, and that the limits of knowledge which, by its nature, empirical science very properly sets for itself, are the limits of all human knowledge. This method in theology need not detain us longer. The chief "experiential theologians" have not adopted it. Schleiermacher cannot be classed here. He laid emphasis on the objective reference in religious experience, and also on its positive historically conditioned character. The feeling of absolute dependence finds its meaning not in the immediate contact of the soul with the Infinite, but is referred to the redemption through Christ.<sup>25</sup> The same thing, of course, is true of Hofmann and Frank.

The different ways in which Christian experience has been used as a source of Christian doctrine, can best be distinguished by looking at the concrete attempts to set forth Christian truth in this way. The theologians who have sought to make Christian experience the source as well as the norm of Christian doctrine differ widely in their theological positions and in their statement of Christian doctrine. They differ, also, in the method by which they seek to draw forth doctrine from experience; but it is important to notice that their difference in the manner in which Christian experience is used, will not explain their great difference in theology. This fact will supply confirmation to a

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Schleiermacher, *Der Christl. Glaube*, § 11, *Werke Abtheil I, Bd. III*, pp. 67ff.

remark which has already been made, namely, that the doctrinal system of Christianity cannot really be derived from Christian experience, and that consequently the doctrinal position of these theologians is really derived from some other source which determines for them the so-called doctrinal content of Christian experience, this determining factor being either the Christian revelation, as in the case of the Erlangen theology, or a philosophical conception of religion and redemption, as in the case of Schleiermacher and the "mediating theology."

Schleiermacher was the first to introduce this subjective idea of the nature and method of Dogmatic Theology. The name which he gave this science—*Glaubenslehre*—or the "science of faith," is an indication of the view which he took of its nature and consequently of its method. He held that religion is essentially feeling, and that it is independent of "theory." Over against the evangelical theology, Schleiermacher maintained that there can be no "external authority" or "blind authority" as he would call it. In this respect he agreed with the rationalist. He opposed Rationalism, on the other hand, as regards its too intellectualistic conception of religion, and as regards its neglect of the historical aspect of Christianity, which aspect had been reduced by Rationalism to a merely symbolical expression of rational truth. Schleiermacher sought to distinguish Christian experience and the Christian consciousness from religious experience in general by referring it to redemption in Christ as its cause.<sup>26</sup> He rejected, nevertheless, all idea of an external authority for religious knowledge. He held that, since according to the evangelical idea, faith was not a mere assent to doctrines, it could not have a doctrinal content

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Glaubenslehre*, §§ 11-14, for Schleiermacher's discussion of the place of historical Christianity and its relation to the religious consciousness. On Schleiermacher compare Kattenbusch, *Von Schleiermacher zu Ritschl*, and the admirable article by O. Kirn, *Herzog P. R. E.* • XVII pp. 587-617. In the latter article will be found references to the large literature on Schleiermacher. Also cf. Wolf, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-55.

determined by a revelation to which it must yield assent. Revelation, moreover, he regarded not as a supernatural communication of truth, but as an inward enlightenment. Accordingly he conceived of Dogmatic Theology as *Glaubenslehre* or the science of faith. Moreover, the nature of Christian doctrine he held to be determined by the nature of Christianity. In the Christian religion the idea of redemption is central, and this redemption is found only in communion with Christ.<sup>27</sup> This can be realized only in faith and experience. Consequently Christian doctrines simply give formulated expression to this Christian life or experience. They describe not so much the object of faith, as the Christian consciousness which is supposed to contain or imply a view of God, the world, and man, which can be scientifically expressed. In accordance with this Schleiermacher defines Christian doctrines as "Conceptions of states of the Christian religious consciousness set forth in formal statement."<sup>28</sup> In order to understand his idea, we must keep clearly in mind two things: First, we must remember that, according to Schleiermacher, the function of the theologian is purely formal. He should seek simply to give scientific expression to the Christian consciousness, and is not to seek, by a method of causal or real inference from the Christian consciousness, to determine the nature of its objects conceived as its causes. This latter method is more like that of Frank. Schleiermacher was simply seeking to give a scientific and doctrinally formulated expression to the Christian consciousness. Secondly, we must bear in mind that, according to Schleiermacher, revelation is not the supernatural communication of truth to man by God, nor yet does it consist in historic events, but is given in and through the Christian consciousness. For this reason we have the above definition of Christian doctrines.

We shall not stop to indicate how Schleiermacher worked

<sup>27</sup> *Glaubenslehre*, § 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Glaubenslehre*, § 15, I, 3, p. 99. Christliche Glaubenssätze sind Auffassungen der Christlich frommen Gemüthszustände in der Rede dargestellt.

this idea and method out in his system. This is well known. We wish rather to point out its defects of principle and method, as illustrating the principles which we have set forth. There have been many different criticisms passed upon Schleiermacher. It is not our purpose to review these. From the point of view which we have taken, we notice first that Schleiermacher has really not escaped the "subjectivism" with which he has so often been charged. The states of the religious and of the Christian consciousness he regarded too exclusively as states of feeling (*Gemüths-zustände*). When the religious consciousness and the Christian consciousness are thus conceived, there is no basis for asserting objective validity for the doctrinal construction. It is probably a concession to his theory of knowledge as much as to his abstract conception of God, when, for example, the doctrine of the Divine attributes is regarded as nothing but different modes of construing the feeling of absolute dependence when we refer it to God. Secondly, not only is our doctrinal construction thus made subjective, but this doctrinal system is not contained in the Christian consciousness or in the religious consciousness conceived as Schleiermacher conceived it, namely, as a state of feeling. Schleiermacher consequently could not escape the dilemma which confronts all such attempts—either to draw the doctrinal content of Christian experience from the Christian revelation in the Scripture or from philosophy. The former was what Frank really did, and the latter seems to have been the fundamental mistake of Schleiermacher. By his reference of Christian experience to the redemption through Christ, he sought to separate Christian experience from religious philosophy, but his conception of that redemption is drawn from another source than the Christian revelation, and thus not only his whole theology but also his view of Christian experience is determined by a mystical and pantheizing conception of religion and of redemption.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Schleiermacher always claimed not to be a pantheist, and that he was not is the view taken by Kirn, *op cit.*, Kattenbusch, *op cit.*, and O.

This illustrates afresh what was said in general criticism of all attempts to make Christian experience the source of the statement of Christian doctrine, namely, that the doctrinal system of Christianity, though implicated by Christian experience, cannot really be drawn from it, and that as a consequence the doctrinal statement is really taken from some other source, either the Christian revelation or a religious philosophy.

As a transition from the method of Schleiermacher to that of Frank, that of F. C. K. von Hofmann of Erlangen should be briefly mentioned.<sup>30</sup> In his *Schriftbeweis* Hofmann is attempting to give proof from Scripture for the "scientific statement of Christianity."<sup>31</sup> Hence the nature of Christianity and of its scientific expression will determine the task of the theologian. Christianity is a personal fellowship with God through the mediation of Christ.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore a fact of experience and life. Hence the scientific statement of Christianity is simply the unfolding of this fact of the Christian consciousness. It is the "self-expression" (*Selbstaussage*) of the Christian.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly the systematizing and dogmatizing function of the theologian is not the mere "description of states of the Christian religious consciousness," nor the simple "reproduction of Scripture doctrine," nor the deduction of Christian doctrines from a central principle, but is the "unfolding of the simple fact (of consciousness) which makes a Christian a Christian and which distinguishes him from one who is not a Christian."<sup>34</sup> The theologian has not to describe states of the religious consciousness, nor yet to infer from this consciousness what must be the nature of its causes, but simply to set forth the

---

*Ritschl, Schleiermachers Stellung zum Christentum in seinen Reden über die Religion*, 1888.

<sup>30</sup> von Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis*,<sup>2</sup> 1857, I, pp. 1-33.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., *op. cit.*, p. 5, "die wissenschaftliche Aussage des Christentums sei es, für welche Beweis ihrer Schriftgemässheit gefordert werde."

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

consciousness itself with its doctrinal implications. The scientific proof for this doctrinal system is threefold: first, in the immediately certain consciousness of regeneration; secondly, in the history of the Church; thirdly, in the Scriptures.<sup>35</sup> Hofmann deals with the proof from Scripture, and is more occupied with this Scripture proof than with the "scientific statement" of Christian doctrine, so that we pass at once to Frank in whom the Erlangen theology culminated, and who is the chief "experiential theologian" since Schleiermacher.

Frank's<sup>36</sup> method may be described as causal or realistic, to distinguish it from that of Schleiermacher, which may be characterized as formal. According to Schleiermacher, the dogmatician must take the Christian consciousness and seek simply to give it expression in the form of scientific concepts. According to Frank, on the other hand, while it must be granted to him against some of his critics, that he did not seek to deduce the Christian doctrinal system from Christian experience apart from the Christian revelation, the theologian must nevertheless start with Christian experience and by the application of the causal principle must show from the nature of Christian experience regarded as an effect, what must be the nature of its causes. Thus according to Schleiermacher, the Christian doctrine is really given in Christian experience, whereas according to Frank, Christian experience does not contain a knowledge of its objects, but such knowledge is to be obtained by using experience as a datum from which the theologian obtains by inference a knowledge of the objects of faith. According to Schleiermacher, the knowing activity of the theologian terminates on experience or states of consciousness; accord-

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Frank, *System der christlichen Gewissheit*, 2 Bde. i. Aufl. 1870-3. 2 Aufl. 1881-3. *System der christlichen Wahrheit*, 2 Bde. 1 Aufl. 1878, 3 Aufl. 1894. Cf. also *Dogmatische Studien* 1892, and an article "Zur dogmatischen Prinzipienlehre", *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* IV (1893), pp. 105-127.

ing to Frank it seeks by means of Christian experience to obtain a knowledge of the objects of Christian faith.

We shall find, however, that just as the feeling of absolute dependence would not yield the system of Christian truth, and consequently Schleiermacher determined his system by a philosophical conception of religion; so also the experience of regeneration by the soul will not yield the doctrinal system of Christianity, and consequently Frank determined his system of doctrine from the Christian revelation and the Lutheran Confessions. We do not affirm by any means that he did this unconsciously. As there is some difference of opinion as to what Frank's intention really was, it is necessary to look more closely at his line of thought.

In order to understand Frank, the following questions should be kept clearly distinct.—First, what is the ground of the Christian faith, or what are the reasons for belief in the truth of Christianity? Secondly, how does a Christian reach certitude as to the objects of his faith? Thirdly, how does a Christian attain "assurance of faith", that is of the genuineness of his own faith and Christian status? It is the second of these questions which Frank is seeking to answer in his *System of Christian Certainty*. He expressly says that it is not the third question with which he is dealing.<sup>37</sup> Seeberg thinks that Frank is seeking an answer to the first of the above questions.<sup>38</sup> But Frank states a number of times that his task is simply to set forth the origin, nature and warrant of the Christian's certitude, where by "warrant" he is obviously not referring to the grounds of belief as a whole, but simply to the specific warrant which Christian certitude carries in itself.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Gewissheit*, I 1.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. art. on Frank by Seeberg, Herzog *P. R. E.*<sup>8</sup> VI pp. 158ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Gewissheit* I, § 1, § 7; and especially *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschr.* iv, p. 123—"der in der Gewissheit des Glaubens stehende Christ, giebt sich Rechenschaft darüber, wie er zu dieser Gewissheit gekommen sei, mit welchem Rechte er an dieser Gewissheit festhalte, und auf welche Stücke Christlicher Wahrheit sie sich beziehe."

The Christian knows that a great change has taken place within him, and continues to take place.<sup>40</sup> He is as certain of this as a man who has been cured of a disease is certain of the fact that he was sick and is now well.<sup>41</sup> This great change Frank calls Regeneration and Conversion. These carry their certitude in themselves, and this certitude includes that of the causes of this Christian experience, since it cannot be explained by any causes within the Christian or in his environment. In this way by inference there arises a certitude in regard to three groups of objects. 1. "Immanent" objects—the state of sin and of regeneration. 2. "Transcendent" objects, that is, God as the cause of regeneration; and not only God but the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Divine-human Mediator are thus given. 3. "Transient" objects through which the Christian experiences the operations of God—the Word, the Sacraments, and the Church.<sup>42</sup> Not only the reality of these objects, but also necessarily some knowledge of their nature is thus implied in the Christian consciousness.

Some of the criticisms which have been made upon Frank's system do not distinguish carefully enough between "Christian certitude" and "assurance of faith" (*Heilsgewissheit*). Daxer has attempted to set aside on this ground most of them, as resting upon a misunderstanding of what Frank was attempting;<sup>43</sup> but not all of them can be answered in this way. One of the sharpest criticisms of Frank is that by H. Cremer.<sup>44</sup> Cremer said that it was in contradiction to the nature of Christianity as a revealed religion to make Christian certitude the starting point of a mode of procedure which developed speculatively the content or object of this certitude. In this way, Cremer affirmed, the Christian historical revelation did not come to its rights, but served only to supplement and correct

<sup>40</sup> *Gewissheit*, i., 120.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, i., 129.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, § 23.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Daxer, *op. cit.*, *Beiträge*, u. s. w., iv., esp. p. 92ff.

<sup>44</sup> H. Cremer in Zöckler's *Handbuch d. theol. Wissenschaften* iii<sup>3</sup> 60ff.

Christian experience. Frank replied to this criticism in an article published shortly before his death.<sup>45</sup> His reply is that Cremer has misunderstood him and reduced his position to an absurd one which he never intended. His method, Frank says, is not speculative, because since Christian truth has been "deposited" (*abgelagert*) in Christian experience by Divine influence through the Christian revelation, it is not speculation to seek to draw this out. And so far from the revelation not having an essential place, Frank affirms that since it is included in the causes of Christian experience, the truth which is inferred from that experience is just the truth contained in the Christian revelation.

But this is precisely the question, namely, granted that the Christian revelation is an instrument in conversion, whether the system of Christian doctrine can be shown in detail to be implicated in that experience. Frank has been criticised often for presupposing that which he wished to draw from Christian experience, namely, the evangelical Lutheran system of doctrine. He seems to imply that we come to the knowledge of these doctrines by our Christian consciousness. Bavinck, for example, says,<sup>46</sup> that he has the impression that Frank held that all these truths could be deduced from the fact or consciousness of regeneration apart from Scripture and the Confessions. There is no doubt that in some places Frank does speak as if Christian doctrine could be deduced from Christian experience. And there is one passage where this is explicitly affirmed.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless Frank frequently denies that he has attempted any such deduction, and Kaftan's description of Frank's method seems to us to be more adequate, when he says that Frank does not attempt to deduce Christian doctrine from the consciousness of regeneration, but that he takes the common Christian faith as stated in the Lutheran symbols,

<sup>45</sup> "Zur dogmatischen Prinzipienlehre", *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschr.* iv., p. 123.

<sup>46</sup> Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* I<sup>2</sup> 562.

<sup>47</sup> *Gewissheit*, § 23, paragraph 2, at the close.

and seeks to show how the certitude of this inner fact of regeneration extends to these objects of faith.<sup>48</sup> But while the Lutheran system is thus consciously presupposed by Frank, it is nevertheless true that he uses the causal principle, and holds that from the nature of Christian experience it can be shown what must be the nature of its causes. And in so doing he does separate Christian experience from revelation and attempt in an artificial way to show that Christian doctrine can be drawn from this experience.

The artificiality as well as the impossibility of this attempt can be observed, by way of example, from the manner in which he seeks to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is implied in the experience of regeneration. Regeneration as a unitary fact presupposes the unity of its transcendent cause. This gives us assurance of the unity of God. Regeneration appears in our consciousness in a manifold of states by which we are assured of the triune nature of God. The transcendent cause of Regeneration, namely, God is distinct as conditioning our consciousness of guilt, as establishing a relation of freedom from guilt, and as introducing the Christian subject into this relation.<sup>49</sup> That this construction of the doctrine of the Trinity is artificial in the extreme, we think cannot be denied. Certainly the doctrine of the Trinity is no mere abstract or speculative doctrine. It is intimately related to Christian experience. It underlies the entire plan of salvation as set forth in Scripture. It determines the religious experience of Christians. It is, we think, not going too far to say with Dr. Charles Hodge, that this and the other doctrines of the Bible are "presupposed in that experience".<sup>50</sup> But the attempt of Frank means more than this. It means that the doctrine having been in part the cause of that experience can then be drawn from it. On examination, however, it appears rather that it has been read into the experience. This seems to illus-

<sup>48</sup> Kaftan, Art. "Glaube und Dogmatik", *Zeitschr. für Theol. und Kirche* i., pp. 512ff.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Gewissheit*, I Abschnitt II., §§ 31-34, pp. 275-327.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* i., p. 442.

trate what has been said, namely, that while Christian experience implicates a system of doctrine, it does not follow that this system can be made explicit from it; that for the reasons we have stated it is the fact that it cannot be made explicit; and that every attempt to make it explicit will be seen to draw the doctrinal statement not from the Christian consciousness but from philosophy or from the Christian revelation.

This criticism of Frank refers of course to his *System of Christian Certainty*. But the situation is not materially altered when we turn to his *System of Christian Truth*.<sup>51</sup> When the objects of the Christian faith are thus attained and certified, it is, according to Frank, the task of the *System of Christian Truth* to set forth these objects. The task of the dogmatician is to understand and set forth these objects in their nature and relations, proceeding now in the opposite direction, with the idea of God as the "*Realprincip*" or organizing principle of the system. The "principle of knowledge" is still the "believing consciousness." But since this consciousness includes in itself the recognition of the authority of Scripture and of the Church's Symbol, Frank made use of Scripture and the Confessions in building up his system.<sup>52</sup> The "believing consciousness" is bound to Scripture and the Confession. It recognizes Scripture "as the original witness of those who through the special witness of God have had an inner experience of the realities once for all revealed".<sup>53</sup> The Scripture, though apparently recognized as an authoritative revelation, is really used thus only as an original record of that Christian experience which was nearest in time to the revelation.

It has already been shown what are the limitations and difficulties of this view, and it is not necessary to repeat now what has been already said. It should be pointed out, however, that if the Scripture revelation is recognized as

---

<sup>51</sup> *System der christlichen Wahrheit* i., pp. 1-91.

<sup>52</sup> *Wahrheit*, p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

supernatural and as containing a communication of truth, as seems to be done by Frank, then it cannot be subordinated to the Christian consciousness so that the consciousness becomes the "principle of knowledge" "out of which the Dogmatician must draw"<sup>54</sup> his doctrines. For there is a sense, Frank says, in which the theologian must draw his doctrine from his own Christian experience since he can only set forth truth as it "reflects itself" in his consciousness. In this way Frank has, in his *System of Christian Truth* as well as in the *System of Christian Certainty*, failed to give to the Scripture revelation the authoritative place which its supernatural character, as recognized by Frank himself, demands.

As already remarked, the "experiential theology" may be said to have culminated in Frank. The theology of those usually considered as belonging to the "mediating theologians" may properly be called "speculative" since their statement of Christian truth is in each case moulded by a particular philosophical point of view. Dorner's position may be briefly mentioned in passing as an example, since he advocates what we may term a speculative experiential method, distinct from that of both Schleiermacher and Frank.<sup>55</sup> Since in the Christian religion, according to Dorner's view, the eternal has entered the sphere of historical fact, the theologian can neither follow a purely speculative method which would develop the doctrinal content of faith from pure thought or reason, nor can he follow a merely "empirical" method of simply reproducing the historically conditioned form of Christian truth as it lies in Scripture. With both Schleiermacher and Frank, Dorner starts from the Christian consciousness and the standpoint of faith. From this point of view Dorner says that there are three possible methods. Schleiermacher not merely made the fact of the Christian consciousness his starting point; he considered the states of consciousness as the sub-

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. pp. 68-70.

<sup>55</sup> Dorner, *Christliche Glaubenslehre* i., § 13, pp. 155ff.

ject matter of Dogmatic Theology. They are the "material" for reflection, and the scientific function of the theologian is simply to give expression to these states of consciousness. In this way, Dorner says, we can reach no knowledge of the objects of the Christian faith, and Schleiermacher, he says, overlooked the fact that a knowledge of the objects of faith is already implied in faith. Frank sought to reach a knowledge of the objects of Christian faith by inference from Christian experience upon the basis of the causal principle. This method according to Dorner is impossible since a consciousness of regeneration already implies a "consciousness of God." The method which Dorner adopts recognizes that the Christian consciousness and faith itself possess a knowledge of God and of Christ, which knowledge the theologian must change or raise to a scientific knowledge. In this process of the development of the knowledge which faith possesses into "scientific" knowledge, however, the content of the Christian faith becomes moulded by the idealistic philosophy of Hegel. Frank's method is therefore most properly typical of the attempt to base dogmatic theology upon Christian experience.

When we say, however, that the attempt at an "experiential theology" culminated really in the Erlangen theology, we mean of course its use in Dogmatic Theology or as a source as well as norm of Christian doctrine. The question as to the place and value of Christian experience in relation to the grounds of the Christian faith and to Christian certitude has called forth a very large literature. Is faith grounded in one's inner personal experience of salvation or in the historic facts of Christianity? And if in historic facts, what facts and how many? We have only to ask such questions to be reminded of the writings of E. Cremer, Köstlin, Kähler, Ihmels, Herrmann, Reischle, Wendt and others. But as regards Dogmatic as distinct from Apologetic Theology, the literature goes back to the names of Schleiermacher and Frank. For example Sogemeier in the

article already referred to, published in 1902, criticises the method of Frank and advocates a return to that of Schleiermacher from the formal point of view, though he would not accept Schleiermacher's view of the content of Christian experience. His remarks on this point, however, seem another illustration of our criticism of this whole theological method, since it is only by appealing to the objective Christian revelation that Christian experience is made by Sogemeier to have a doctrinal content which is truly Christian. On the other hand, with some slight differences, Daxer in the article we have cited, Schnedermann<sup>56</sup>, and in this country F. H. Foster in the book already mentioned, have advocated, in general, the method of Frank.

A second subjective method in Dogmatic Theology is that of the so-called Ritschlian school. This theology has sometimes been characterized as an "experiential theology", and their method described by saying that they find in the Scripture the source of Christian doctrine, and its norm in Christian experience. This, however, is not an accurate description of most of this school. They can scarcely be classed among the "experiential theologians", though their norm of truth is subjective. They seek, in nearly every case, to determine in some way the "revelation-content" of Scripture, that is, they seek to determine what in the Scripture is really a revelation. And since with most of them it is not the Christian consciousness or experience by which they separate this revelation from the rest of Scripture, they can scarcely be called "experiential theologians".

This Ritschlian school, speaking very generally, attaches itself to two points which Dorner had emphasized, namely, first, that Christian experience is most intimately associated with historical facts, especially with the "fact of Christ"; and secondly, that faith, which conditions Christian experience, itself includes a knowledge of its object. Ritschl sought to avoid the abstraction or separation of Christian

<sup>56</sup> Schnedermann—"Subjectivismus und Objectivismus in der Theol.", *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschr.* iii., 352ff., *ibid.*, i., 416.

experience from objective historical facts. This he believed to have been the mistake of Schleiermacher and Frank. He agreed, however, with these theologians and Dorner in rejecting the idea that revelation involves the communication of truth by God to man, and consequently the authority of the Scriptures in the sense of the old evangelical theology. He agreed with Dorner as against Schleiermacher and Frank in his greater emphasis on the dependence of Christian experience on the historic Christ. But he agreed with Schleiermacher and Frank as against Dorner in separating Christian truth from philosophy. In this, however, Ritschl resembled Schleiermacher rather than Frank. For, like Schleiermacher, Ritschl allowed his idea of Christ to be determined by certain philosophical ideas drawn from a source outside the Christian revelation. The Christ with which Ritschl leaves us, is just the meagre portrait of Jesus that is left after a historical criticism determined by naturalism has done its work, and after every metaphysical element has been eliminated. Ritschl's theology, therefore, is determined by a certain philosophy rather than by Christian experience. He has kept theology free from Platonism and Hegelianism, but not from an incongruous mixture of Kant and Lotze. It is not without some degree of justice, therefore, though far from Ritschl's intention, that he has been accused of rationalism by a theologian of Christian experience, namely, by Frank. Ritschl's position, however, illustrates well what has been said, namely, that Christian experience cannot serve as the norm of Christian doctrine.

The doctrine involved in this experience is given by a historical revelation, and either that revelation in its purity or as moulded by some philosophy foreign to it, will necessarily determine the theological construction.

Very much the same thing is illustrated by Kaftan. He cannot accept the idea that the Scripture contains revealed doctrines, and his method of determining what in the Scripture is revelation, illustrates his subjective method. His idea of the nature and method of Dogmatic Theology in

relation to faith and Christian experience, can be best understood in connection with those of Schleiermacher, Frank, and Dorner, with whose views Kaftan contrasts his own.<sup>58</sup> Kaftan maintains that faith involves a knowledge of its own, which, though not a "theoretic" knowledge, is nevertheless an adequate knowledge of its objects. The problem of the nature of Dogmatics is simply that of the relation of scientific theological knowledge to this knowledge which faith possesses. Kaftan thinks that Schleiermacher made the mistake of conceiving of the Christian consciousness too much as if it were mere feeling, thus failing to apprehend the knowledge involved in faith. Frank, Kaftan thinks, also made the mistake of failing to recognize the knowledge actually involved in the Christian consciousness, so that he sought to obtain this knowledge by a process of inference from Christian experience. The result of this is that the scientific knowledge of theology is confounded with the knowledge which faith has, and theological knowledge is supposed to be of an experiential character. In addition to this, theological knowledge is supposed to be a direct knowledge of God, instead of being simply an exposition in scientific form of that knowledge of God which is involved in Christian faith. Dorner makes a different mistake, according to Kaftan. Dorner recognized that faith has a knowledge of God, but he failed to realize that this is an adequate knowledge, and so fell into the mistake of supposing that it was the task of theology to raise this faith-knowledge to scientific knowledge or to transform *pistis* into *gnosis*. In contrast with all these views, Kaftan affirms that the knowledge which faith has is an adequate one, and that the task of the dogmatic theologian is simply to set forth in a scientific and systematic form the knowledge which faith itself has. This knowledge is given by the Christian revelation, and this is contained in the Scripture, so that Kaftan affirms that this revelation in the Scripture

<sup>58</sup> Kaftan, "Glaube und Dogmatik", in *Zeitschrift für Theol. und Kirche*, i., pp. 479-549, especially 509ff.

is the "principle" of authority and knowledge in Christian Dogmatics.<sup>59</sup>

But Kaftan affirms that we are not to take our doctrines directly from Scripture, as that would betray a misapprehension of the nature of revelation. The Scripture is not a sum of authoritative doctrine, but "every doctrine is in accordance with Scripture, which is a necessary part in the doctrinal expression of the faith which has appropriated to itself the revelation witnessed to in Scripture".<sup>60</sup> Faith, therefore, in the subjective sense of the term, is supposed in some way to mediate between Scripture and the statement of theological truth. But faith is just an inner attitude of trust, and Kaftan himself tells us again and again that the truth believed in comes from revelation. His idea of revelation is the important point. And here we seem to be moving in a circle. Revelation, Kaftan says, is not the supernatural communication of truths, but an activity of God in a series of historical acts. But Kaftan will not say with Herrmann that the historic facts arouse a Christian experience out of which the doctrinal interpretation of the facts is supposed to grow. He explicitly rejects this idea, and affirms that the facts must come to us interpreted, and that this interpretation is a part of revelation. And yet this doctrinal or interpretative element is not to be found in the New Testament interpretation of the great Christian facts, but faith, once more, is said to "mediate" between the Scripture statements and Christian truth.<sup>61</sup> Thus we are brought in a circle back again to faith which cannot thus determine what in Scripture is revelation, since faith itself derives from this revelation its content of truth. In point of fact, however, it is Kaftan's philosophical views of the nature of the Kingdom of God and Redemption which constitute for him the norm of Christian truth. Like Ritschl, therefore, he too illustrates the truth that Christian faith and

<sup>59</sup> Cf. "Zur Dogmatik", *Zeitschr. für Theol. und Kirche*, 1903, p. 458.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Article—"Was ist Schriftgemäss?" *Zeitschr. u. s. w.*, 1893, p. 120.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. §§ on Faith and Revelation, in Kaftan, *Dogmatik*.

experience have a doctrinal element already given, and that if the Scripture doctrine is not accepted as an objective revelation, it must be a philosophical or rational idea which is made the norm of Christian truth.

Haering,<sup>62</sup> on the other hand, can seek to escape this rationalistic element only by becoming more avowedly subjective. The norm of Christian truth, Haering says, is the revelation contained in the Scripture. But the way in which, and the extent to which, the Scripture is authoritative, is determined by his idea of revelation which involves the notion of approval by the Christian consciousness or experience as aroused by Christ. Hence the authority of Scripture is held to extend only to matters of faith, and then only as they approve themselves to Christian experience. Thus Haering approaches more closely to the "experiential theology", in making the Christian consciousness the final norm of Christian truth.

Wendt<sup>63</sup> likewise is to be classed here. It is true that he keeps distinct the question as to the truth of Christianity, and that as to the norm of Christian truth. And this latter he says is a historical question and to be objectively determined. He finds this standard of Christian truth in "the Gospel of Jesus". He says that this is to be found in what Jesus taught, and he rejects what he calls the method which "determines the revelation-content of Scripture". Nevertheless he has not given an objective standard for determining what in the New Testament is Christian truth. He affirms that the Gospel of Jesus is not identical with the teaching of Jesus, and that in the latter we must separate the abiding truth from that which is only accidental. This after all is really an attempt to determine the "revelation-content" of the Scripture, and to "distinguish between the divine and human elements" in the Bible, methods of procedure which Wendt wishes to reject. This is also the

<sup>62</sup> Haering—*Der. Christl. Glaube (Dogmatik)*, 1906, pp. 145ff., 159ff., 172-179.

<sup>63</sup> Wendt, *System der christl. Lehre*, 1906 & 7, i., pp. 45-55.

judgment of S. Eck<sup>64</sup> who, in reviewing Wendt's book, asks if it does not presuppose a peculiar spiritual "sensorium", thus to set forth a scale of values and determine what is of abiding value in the teaching of Jesus. Wendt is not, after all, so very far from the "experiential theology".

Herrmann<sup>65</sup> realizes fully the necessarily subjective and individualistic character of a theology which thus rejects the authority of the Scripture doctrine. His idea of revelation is limited to the experience of God through the so-called historic Christ, the doctrinal element of Christianity being simply the ideas implied in this experience. And since it depends thus on the experience of the individual, it is impossible for theology to state any universally valid Christian doctrine. This is fully recognized and asserted by Herrmann. In this way Christian doctrine becomes a matter of individual experience. Whereas in his idea of the so-called historic Christ, Herrmann like Ritschl is governed by philosophical presuppositions, so that he shows really a combination of the rationalistic and experiential methods.

This method of the Ritschlian school thus illustrates the principles which have been expounded. If Christian experience is really Christian, it is connected with the great historic facts of Christianity, which are connected primarily with the life of Christ. And if this is so, then Christian experience is conditioned by a faith which is not a mere subjective feeling, but which, in trusting in Christ, receives Him as Saviour, as Saviour from sin, and as a divine Saviour. We cannot speak of the bare fact of Christ, and consequently Christian experience is determined by an interpretation of Christ and of Christianity. This interpretation, we have seen, cannot be evolved or deduced from Christian experience. If Christianity, that is, the Christianity of the New Testament, were the product of natural

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Eck on Wendt's *Syst. d. chr. Lehre*, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* No. 21, 1907, p. 596.

<sup>65</sup> Herrmann, "Christl. prot. Dogmatik," in *Kultur der Gegenwart*. Teil. i., Abt. 4, Lief. 3, pp. 583-630. Also "Die Lage und Aufgabe der ev. Dogmatik," Articles in *Zeitschr. für Theol. u. Kirche*, 1907.

religious sentiment, it would then be possible to derive the doctrinal content of religious experience from the human reason and to exhibit Christianity as the product of the evolution of human religious thought. But if sin is a fact, if it has darkened our natural knowledge of God, and if the nature of the Christian revelation is historical and supernatural, then this revelation is the norm as well as the source of Christian truth and knowledge. And if it is a truly supernatural revelation, we must go to its bearers or organs in order to determine to what extent the books in which it is recorded contain it.

C. WISTAR HODGE.

*Princeton.*