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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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The fifty-fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, met in the Central Church, Kansas City, Mo., May 21, 1914, and was dissolved at 3:30 P. M., Thursday, May 28th. This is the third Assembly in succession which has limited the span of its life to six working days. These precedents will probably have the force of law for the future. Time was when the Assembly had to rush its business toward the close, in order to dissolution by the end of the ninth day from date of organization. The volume of business has increased rather than diminished. The recent Assemblies have shortened the time not by covering less ground, but by increasing the speed. The liberty of speech has been abridged. It has come to pass that by the time a speaker gets fairly launched, the cry of "question," "question," warns the speaker that further effort to get a hearing for his views will be useless. Age and distinguished services do not secure immunity from such discourtesy. The Assembly is ceasing to be a deliberative body, and coming to be an organization merely for business routine.

Obviously, our Assemblies are inoculated with the speed-madness of the age. It could hardly be otherwise. The members, who compose the Assembly, are accustomed, by the use of the telephone, rapid transit, and other time-saving devices, to dispatch business at a rate that would have made a former generation dizzy. The speed at which we live is constantly increasing,

BOOKS

Any book noticed in these pages may be had at publisher's prices through the Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Richmond, Va.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: A SYSTEM OF DOGMATICS. *By Theodore Haering, D. D., Professor of Theology in the University of Tübingen*
Translated from the second revised and enlarged German Edition, 1912. By John Dickie, M. A., Professor of Theology in Knox College, Dunedin, and George Ferries, D. D., author of "The Growth of Christian Faith." 2 vols. Octavo 952 pages. Net \$6.00. Hodder & Stoughton: London, New York, Toronto. 1913.

The publishers have presented Professor Haering's treatise on the Christian Faith in praise-worthy fashion. The paper is good, the type large, clear and grateful to the eye. The binding is an excellent linen buckram. The volumes are imposing in outward aspect.

Worthy attempts at the exposition of the system of Bible teachings should always be so printed that readers may be drawn to the perusal of the great system of scriptural teaching. Our laymen should be enticed to reading the true theological system drawn from the divine word, "Good theology feeds the soul." It is "believing witness to Christ." Our preachers should be drawn to more reading of true Christian theology. Some of them decry systematic theology. They should, on the contrary, learn from Phillips Brooks that no preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine; that hearers like "to feel the bones in a man's sermon as one does in shaking his hand," and that the people must have doctrinal teaching in order to stability of Christian character.

According to Dr. Robertson Nicoll, Professor Haering's treatise is one that should be read by laymen and ministers. He says: "The best books on dogmatics, as it were, keep their author in them; to read them is not like listening to an echo; we hear the personal intonation, and feel the impact and warmth of the writer's faith. Haering's book is conspicuously a case in point. Any one can see that behind this massive edifice, built to the honor of Jesus, there stands a character formed on such simple and manly tenets as inspire fearlessness and the love of the truth.

Throughout we are in touch with one to whom God in Christ is the great reality. * * * Haering, we may be sure, will take his place beside Dorner and Martensen, those giants of the past; but, in fact,

he is much nearer than either to the Christian life as the simple-hearted actually live it. He has more than either to give the preacher. * * * "It is men on the outlook for positive, distinct, characteristic Christian truth—truth as deep as eternity and as wide as need—which can be spoken out in faith and hope and love, who will quickly discern the unsurpassed riches of this book."

With this estimate of Professor Haering's work, we, in part concur, but only in part. This Tübingen professor is apparently very earnest and honest in his search after truth. His equipment for successful search is in some particulars large. He is manifestly a man of large theological, philosophical and biblical learning. He is a keen critic of systems, which, for reasons, good, indifferent, or bad, he rejects. He is endowed with constructive ability—is able to seize a principle of organization and to keep it steadily before him throughout the whole of his extensive work. His thought is characterized by a massive if vague unity, as the average reader will see it. He seems reverent, pious, and devoutly desirous of making his teaching practically useful in drawing the world Christward, as he understands Christ, and Godward. Some of the minor discussions are peculiarly strong. Incidental features of his main discussions are valuable.

Nevertheless, we cannot repeat Dr. Nicoll's praiseful words without the rise of a sense of obligation to qualify their force considerably by remarking both about the form of the work and about particulars of its content.

1st. The literary style is a sort of puzzle to us. Often it is clear, direct and forceful, but often it is most circumambient, circumlocutory, periphrastic, roundabout, tedious therefore, prolix and unclear. We have more than once met men who regarded Dabney's *Theology* as poor in literary style and difficult to grasp because of its literary expression; but it is transparency, directness, a thing of primer-like simplicity as compared with pages in this book. It is possible that the style of Professor Haering's work, as it lies before us, may be explained by the hypotheses that where his translators thoroughly understood him, they put his thoughts into good English expression, and that when they did not understand him perfectly they translated more literally. We can hardly regard the work of the translators as perfect; for in a case or two, we have come upon a sentence which makes no sense; but which can be converted into an intelligible and apparently pertinent statement by a change of a negative or other hinge word.

2nd. His method of handling a topic lacks somewhat of being wholly satisfactory. He is wont, when dealing with a subject, to review its history in brief fashion, bringing out the gist of the several positions held as to it by the church, or parties in the church, in all the ages past; and, by a process of exclusion, to throw out such

elements as he regards as untenable; and, in the end, to try the residuum by a partial application to it of Scripture; and, in the light of Scripture very partially regarded and imperfectly grasped to subtract from or add to the residuum and so reach his conclusion—the doctrine which, as he sees things, should be taught. For clearness and power to enstamp a doctrine on the mind we believe that a method which presents the scriptural positions first, proves it by positive arguments, including the scriptural, then presents objections and annihilates them, is more to be desired. The student knows what is to be done, sees it done, and sees the solidity of the work tried.

3rd. The position of the author concerning Holy Scripture is far from satisfactory. We are glad to say that he holds that Jesus is "the perfect self-revelation of God," and that we have a history of this revelation trustworthy to a high degree of probability. He quotes E. Troeltsch in this connection as follows: "The fireworks of sensational hypotheses will come to an end, and the church's own view of its origin will be substantially vindicated. Christianity did not arise out of a misunderstanding, or an amalgam of alien redemptive myths. It had its origin in the life and personality of Jesus. The essential features of his preaching can be known with sufficient certainty, to make it a religious unity, for every one who attributes fundamental religious significance to it. When the clouds' dust subsides, the old aspect of things will remain in its essentials, to this extent at least, that Jesus will continue to be the source and power of Christian faith." (See pp. 216-227.) His views of Scripture may be further gathered from the following quotation:

"The writings combined in our New Testament go back, for the most part, to the infancy of the church, before the appearance of the great heresies and the origin of the old Catholic church, which was conditioned thereby. Among them are sources of the first rank, understanding the word in the historical sense, or at least such recognizably lie at the basis of these writings. The uncertainties of many kinds in matters of detail, however, and the changing, but growing, insight into the facts of the case, correspond exactly to the nature of history as well as of faith, provided that the two entities understand their own nature accurately (cf. pp. 216, ff.). But the purely historical investigation of Holy Scripture permits of these general positions being construed yet more precisely. Not only these primary sources of the first class, but even writings probably more recent, perhaps contemporary with many rejected by the church (e. g., Hebrews compared with 1 Clement and Barnabas), have in common, though again in different degrees (as is always the case when dealing with matters of actual history), a peculiar characteristic, which other ancient Christian literature is without, or does not exhibit so markedly; what has been called their particular relation of dependence on the Old

Testament. That is, they understand the religion of Israel, especially its prophetic stage, as actually preparatory, but also as merely preparatory revelation. Now an account of the early judaizing and hellenizing of the gospel, this individual peculiarity cannot be understood except as a testimony to the original understanding of the revelation in Jesus, consequently as his act, his understanding of the Old Testament, derived from himself. Thus the tact of the ancient church in the settling of the Canon is justified on lines of purely historical investigation." (See pp. 287-288.)

Not mind but faith, according to Professor Haering, apprehends the certainty of this revelation; because it satisfies our highest needs and because God evinces Himself therein in action. "In the actual history of our religion, the deeper understanding of the idea of it has always sprung from the testimonies which faith has given regarding its actual origin. *It is just this which becomes anew the standard whereby the separate statements of Scripture are measured, according to the position reached by each age in the understanding of the idea.*"

We have given us thus a historic revelation; but one full of errors, and interpreted according to an ever-changing norm. We dislike both the estimate of the Apostles and the unstable subjectivity of the scheme of interpretation of their writings.

4th. His doctrine of God and the divine attributes is not satisfactory. Thus he says (p. 345): "At the close of this discussion of the statement that God is love, we see more clearly than we could have done when we started, the truth of the statement that in our religion love is not an attribute of God; it is indeed a *designation for his essence*. When we say 'God is love,' subject and predicate are identified, and for the Christian church this identification is the inexhaustible ground of its worship; it is never for the church, so to speak, an analytical judgment; it is always a new feat of faith, but one that is possible only where we have revelation as a basis. The only one who, humanly speaking, could make himself the end of his existence refuses to do so. He is love."

This identifying of God with an attribute—with a quality—is senseless to the plain mind. One does not identify a razor with sharpness.

In discussing the attributes of God he discusses the attributes of God's love (see p. 492, ff.) as grace, mercy, wrath, righteousness, wisdom. With regard to the wrath of God, he says (p. 495): "The strictness and holiness of the divine love must be maintained unimpaired. But the expression 'wrath of God' can be employed only with reverent reserve which we owe to the mystery of the divine life; and it is only in a very metaphorical sense that wrath can be designated as an attribute of God." He says (pp. 495-496) of the righteousness of God: "There can be no question, however, that we still require to speak of the *righteousness* of God as a specially important attribute.

Its specific character consists in its summing up in a single word the various modes of the activity of the love of God, both those which forgive and heal sin, and those which condemn and destroy it. That would certainly not be the case if our old divines were correct in their idea of righteousness as a purely and distinctly juristic conception. * * * How much they were in earnest in this is shown by their doctrine of the atonement, the whole purpose of which was to prove the compatability of the righteousness and mercy of God, according to the standards of this righteousness regarded as punitive.

Now this resolving of all the attributes of God into modes of the attribute of love is not biblical, as the plain reader of the Bible sees its teaching. The Bible presents God "as a consuming fire" as well as "love." It presents Him as infinitely righteous as well as infinitely loving.

5th. Although the limits assigned by our editor to this notice have been reached, we must say, that the discussions of sin and guilt, and of the atonement (both which word and the word redemption Dr. Haering would throw away), and of justification, and other subjects, are thoroughly unsatisfactory. Just as unsatisfactory, also, are the author's doctrine as to the way in which religious truth is certified to us, his wide distinction between religion and ethics, and his setting aside of the doctrine of the Trinity. As to this last, he represents Jesus, indeed, as the full self-revelation of God, but as in his personality merely human. He says (p. 669): "In fact we can add that faith in Christ is unifying; whereas language about his divinity may as well cause division, and in our circumstances, which have been shaped by history, must often cause division." Again (p. 670): "The essential difference between our faith in Christ and all syncrotistic mysticism in worship, becomes in this way much plainer than by vague revival of old speculations upon the 'Divinity of Christ.' The preference shown in the New Testament for this word 'Lord' rather than 'God,' and that too just where 'Lord' is used in the relation which it bears in the Old Testament, points to the proper course for us as being the full revelation of God. Jesus is more than any 'god' of the religion of the olden time; but just for that reason, he is not 'God,' otherwise he would be no revelation of God." Again (p. 921): "There remains then nothing but to express the abiding sense of the traditional formula, that is to state once more what was developed in the doctrine of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and what was manifestly also the main purpose of the church, when in the forms of thought of the time it laid down its doctrine of God. *The revelation of God which is given in Jesus Christ, is not a chance and passing glimpse which may be superseded by another, but it is actually the full self-revelation of God, of holy love. And when God in Christ awakens in his church and*

in each individual amongst us, faith and personal trust in this love of His, that is actually personal spiritual communion with Himself. Thus understood the confession serves as a buttress of monotheism, as well as a guard against pantheism." This teaching is like Polk Miller's Limburgher cheese in the eyes of Uncle Jacob. "It is purty fur gone."

In concluding this notice of a great work, for the worthy statement and brief discussion of the main points of which forty pages of this review would hardly suffice, it may be well to say, that, *theologically*, Dr. Haering is a free and independent disciple of Ritschl and of Sechleiermacher, and that, *philosophically*, he seems to follow Kant and Lotze, in the same way; that like Schleiermacher and Ritschl, he understands the drifts of the thought of his age and would so present Christianity—the Christian Faith—as to secure for it a propitious hearing; but that in the effort to accomplish this, he so changes it that he may be justly said to be preaching another gospel, in essential particulars; that, like Kant, he holds that we cannot know objective realities, cannot know God, albeit we can be certain of Him.

His teaching may serve as a ladder to help some out of the pit of isms into which he has fallen. But once out of the pit he would do well to read Calvin's Institutes, or even Hodge, Shedd, or Dabney, to learn a more scriptural system of theology.

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THE GLORIOUS COMPANY OF THE APOSTLES. Being Studies in the Characters of the Twelve. By J. D. Jones. M. A., B. D., Author of "The Gospel of Grace," "The Model Prayer," etc. New York. George H. Doran Company. Pp. 260. 50c net.

This is a small volume of sermons. The author tells us in his preface that they have been printed exactly as they were spoken. This lends to them a directness and familiarity, while it accounts for a certain repetitiousness and at times inaccuracy of expression.

On the whole, the book is edifying. The preacher is constrained to enter on these studies of the Twelve—"First, because by studying the characters of the men whom Christ selected to be his intimates and chief associates, we are certain to learn something about the character and aims of our Lord himself." The first aim of the author therefore is to study the Lord himself from the angle which this subject furnishes.

It seems to us that he sometimes makes mistakes. For instance, when he is dealing with the statement of Mark: "He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to